THE 'BLACKWOOD' GROUP

BY SIR GEORGE DOUGLAS

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SIR GEORGE DOUGLAS

FAMOUS
·SCOTS·
·SERIES·

PUBLISHED BY
OLIPHANT ANDERSON
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THE BLACKWOOD GROUP.

JOHN WILSON.

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THOMAS HAMILTON.

Note—The Ettrick Shepherd and John Gibson Lockhart, conspicuous by their absence from the above list of writers associated with the early days of the publishing-house of Blackwood, will receive attention in forthcoming volumes of the series.

JOHN WILSON

Is it too bold a thing to say that the reputation of 'Christopher North,' the man, has survived that of his works? Third in the great dynasty of Scottish literary sovereigns, he ascended the throne upon the death of Scott, reigned gloriously and held high state in the Northern Capital—whence in earlier days he had waged direst war—and at his death passed on the sceptre to Carlyle, from whom in turn it descended to Stevenson. To us of to-day, he looms on the horizon of the past, the representative of a vanished race of physical and intellectual giants,—the historic legend revealing him as before all things a good man of his inches, a prince of boon-companions and good-fellows, a wit, a hard hitter, the soul and centre of a brilliant circle, and the author of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Many other works he wrote —important in their own day—but now not unjustly forgotten, or all but forgotten. But the man himself was greater than his works; he, more than they, is our enduring possession; his memory it behoves us to preserve.

The story of his life has been told, in terms of affectionate appreciation, by his daughter, Mrs Gordon. Born at Paisley—in a neighbourhood where that natural beauty to which he was so susceptible was still at that time almost unsullied—on the 18th May 1785, he was the

eldest of his parents' sons and their fourth child. His father, a gauze-manufacturer by trade, was possessed of considerable wealth; whilst through his mother, whose maiden name was Sym, and who claimed descent from the great Marquis of Montrose, he had inherited a strain of 'gentle' blood. From the first he was a robust and lively boy, and his childhood, being passed under the most favourable of conditions, was an entirely happy one. His taste for field-sport first declared itself at the early age of three years, when equipped with willow-wand, thread, and crooked pin, he set off, unattended, on an adventurous angling expedition. Meantime the parallel mental activity, which was to be through life his characteristic, was manifested in quaint infantine pulpit-oratory at home. After receiving the rudiments of instruction at Paisley, he was placed as a boarder with the minister of the neighbouring parish of Mearns, with whom he remained until his twelfth year. Here he was not less happy than at home. Without doors—and one thinks of him as a boy whose life was spent chiefly in the open air—he had a wide and beautiful country to range; whilst within, his education proceeded merrily—he was foremost among his young companions at the task as well as in the playground—and he was carefully trained in the paths of wisdom and virtue. In later life his memory reverted fondly to these days, to which his writings contain various references—as when he tells of boyish shooting experiences, with an antiquated musket, traditionally supposed to have been 'out' in both the Fifteen and the Forty-five, of an adventure in a storm when lost upon the moors, and so forth. In his twelfth year he lost his father, and soon

afterwards he was placed at the University of Glasgow, where he continued to attend classes until the year 1803. Here he resided in the house of the Professor of Logic, Professor Jardine, to whom and to the Greek Professor, Young, he in later life gratefully acknowledged his debt. Meantime his mother with her young family had gone to live in Edinburgh.

There and at Glasgow, from January to October 1801, young Wilson kept a diary, which was preserved, and from which his biographer prints some extracts. These are disappointing; but the document itself is remarkable for orderliness and precision, exhibiting the writer as the very pattern of a well-brought-up youth. More interesting, however, as a manifestation of character is the impulse which, in the year following, led the seventeen-year-old young man to address a letter of generous admiration, not, however, untempered with criticism, to the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth replied, and thus was begun an intercourse which was afterwards destined to ripen into friendship.

In June 1803, Wilson was transferred from Glasgow to Oxford, where he was entered as a gentleman-commoner of Magdalen College. He began his career there with ambitious views, his course of study, as shown by his commonplace books, being designed to embrace not only the prescribed curriculum in the Ancient Classics, but studies in Law, History, Philosophy, and Poetry as well. But, if he read hard—as, with occasional intermissions, he undoubtedly did—he also entered with zest into the athletics and other amusements of the place, testing his prowess in wrestling, leaping, boating, and running, and, at the same time, indulging in what to a later age may

appear the more questionable sports of pugilism and cock-fighting. Some traditions of the feats then performed by him survive. Among these are stories of his triumphant encounter with a certain redoubtable pugilist who had insulted him ; of his coming out one night from a dinner-party in Grosvenor Square, and proceeding then and there to walk back to Oxford—accomplishing the distance of fifty-eight miles in some eight or nine hours; or, of his clearing the river Cherwell at a flying leap—twenty-three feet in breadth on the dead level. Yet, these distractions notwithstanding, he succeeded in passing the examination for his Bachelor's Degree, in a manner which his tutor characterised as 'glorious,' and in producing such an impression of scholarship on the minds of the Examiners as to call forth the rare testimony of a public expression of their thanks. He also carried off the Newdigate Prize, awarded for English verse. In commenting on the amiability of his disposition, his biographer observes that he harboured not an envious thought. But surely to have done so were a very superfluity of naughtiness ; for, gifted as he was, by fortune as well as nature, whom was it possible for this admirable youth to envy ?

After taking his degree, he still continued for a time to frequent Oxford, astonishing the younger members of the common-room of his college by his extraordinary conversational powers and by occasional quaint freaks, but at the same time delighting them by his good-humour. It is told of him at this time that he would sometimes indulge his fancy by resorting to the coaching-inns at the hour of the arrival of the mails, presiding at the travellers' supper-table, and hob-nobbing with all and sundry, whom his wit and pleasantry seldom failed to impress. At this

era his personal appearance is described as especially striking. It was that of a man of great muscular strength, but lightly built; about five feet ten inches in height, with uncommon breadth of chest; florid, and wearing a profusion of hair, and enormous whiskers—the latter being in those days very unusual. De Quincey says he was not handsome, but against such testimony we may surely set off that of Raeburn's portrait, painted a few years earlier.

These ought to have been golden days, indeed, but much of their happiness was marred by an unlucky love-affair. At Glasgow, some years before, Wilson had made the acquaintance of a young lady of great charm of person and character, who in the biography figures as 'Margaret,' or The Orphan Maid. The impression which she produced upon him was profound and lasting, and at parting he had inscribed to her a small volume of manuscript poems of his own. From this point the biographer is rather vague in her account of the progress of the attachment; yet we have abundant evidence that its course was a most troubled one. For instance, in August 1803, we find our hero writing to a friend in the following desperate strain:—'By heavens! I will, perhaps, some day blow my brains out, and there is an end of the matter.' Later he says: 'The word happy will never again be joined to the name of John Wilson.' And again he speaks of summoning two friends to support him and pass with him the night on which Margaret was to be married to another. This dreaded marriage did not take place, but it is quite evident that the lover long continued in a most unsettled state of mind. Thus we hear of his having swallowed laudanum, lost his powers of study, indulged in 'unbridled

dissipation'; of sudden aimless journeys, undertaken on the spur of the moment, and landing him at nightfall at such unlikely places as Coventry or Nottingham; of solitary rambles in Ireland and in Wales. 'Whilst I keep moving,' he writes, in October 1805, 'life goes on well enough; but whenever I pause the fever of the soul begins.' He even entertained an idea of joining the expedition of Mungo Park to Timbuctoo. No doubt in all this he believed himself sincere enough at the time, but it is not necessary for us to take his utterances quite seriously. The blowing out of brains has been alluded to, and it seems more than probable that a point of Wertherism entered into his distemper. At any rate, in giving an order for the works of Rousseau at the time, he is careful to emphasize his desire to have them complete. In dismissing the episode it may be mentioned that, though the various obstacles to a union between himself and Margaret are not detailed, in his case filial obedience would seem to have been the final deterrent.

During a tour in the English lake country in 1805, Wilson had fallen in love with and purchased the property of Elleray, consisting of a delightful cottage-residence, standing in grounds of its own, and commanding lovely views of mountain, lawn, and forest scenery, rising above the waters of Lake Windermere; and it was there that, on leaving Oxford in 1807, he took up his abode. He was now in the fullest sense his own master, and at this point it may be worth while briefly to take note of his attitude towards life.

The ideal of the sound mind in the sound body has been universally recognised as a good one; but, whether deliberately or instinctively, Wilson seems to have aimed

higher still. He aspired to the mind of a philosopher in the body of an athlete; and the word philosopher must here be taken in its highest sense—to signify not the thinker only, but the lover of wisdom for its own sake. A saner or loftier ideal could scarcely be conceived; and Nature, who too often unites the soaring mind with the body which does it previous wrong, had in this case given the means of attaining, or at least approaching it. Thus the Christopher North of this period remains a possession and a standard of manhood to his countrymen. He brings home to them the Hellenic ideal, pure and unvitiated by any taint of Keatsian sensuality, as Goethe had brought it home to Germany. In the process of naturalization that ideal underwent some modification; but the fact that the poetry which North wrote at this time was of perishable quality does not in reality detract from the service which he rendered to his country.

For poetical composition seems to have been now the serious business of his life. As for his diversions, they remained of the same healthy type as in his Oxford days. The sailing of a fleet of boats on Windermere, and the rearing of game birds were perhaps his special hobbies; but wherever manly exercises were to the fore, there was he to be found. The country in which he was now located being a wrestling country, he became an enthusiastic patron of that excellent exercise, and effected much for its encouragement. And at the same time he was free of the society of Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, and the other able and gifted men whose presence made the district at that era a centre of intellectual light.

Amid these varied interests, two or three years were passed contentedly enough; but at the end of that time

we find Wilson writing to a friend of his need of an anchor in life. 'I do not, I hope, want either ballast, or cargo, or sail,' he writes, 'but I do want an anchor most confoundedly, and, without it, shall keep beating about the great sea of life to very little purpose.' This 'anchor' he was fated to find in the person of Miss Jane Penny, the daughter of a Liverpool merchant, a favourite partner of his own at the local dances, and at that time the 'leading belle of the Lake Country,' to whom he was happily married on the 11th May 1811.

His marriage had the effect of somewhat delaying the publication of a volume of poetry which he had previously been preparing for the press, and it was not until February of the following year that *The Isle of Palms, and Other Poems* made its appearance—having been shortly preceded by an anonymously-published elegy on the death of James Grahame, author of *The Sabbath.*

The Isle of Palms tells in mellifluous numbers the story of a pair of lovers, shipwrecked on an island paradise in tropic seas, who espouse each other in the sight of Nature and Heaven. Of course the idyll rresistibly recalls Bernardin's masterpiece, and, judging between the two, it must be acknowledged that in originality and artistic perfection the Frenchman's prose has greatly the advantage. But it is noticeable and must be counted to Wilson's credit that, whilst profoundly influenced by pre-Revolutionary thought, he never, even at this early period of his life, allows himself to be led away from the paths prescribed by virtue and religion. His healthy instinct, fortified by excellent training, sufficed to show him that anarchy in the moral world is no more a part of nature's scheme than is habitual excess; and thus the worship of Liberty and the State of Nature,

which afterwards led to such questionable results in the cases of Byron and of Shelley, left him entirely unharmed. It is true that rigid formalists have been found to object to the 'natural marriage' of the lovers in the poem, deploring the absence of a clergyman on the island. But with these we need not concern ourselves.

The success of the poems was but moderate; yet it sufficed to bring the author into notice in Edinburgh, where he and his wife were spending the season with his mother and sisters, and whence Sir Walter Scott wrote of him, in a letter to Joanna Baillie, as 'an excellent, warm-hearted, and enthusiastic young man,' adding that, 'Something too much, perhaps, of the latter quality' placed him upon the list of originals.

Dividing his time between Edinburgh and Elleray, the young poet now continued to vary his active open-air life by the plotting and composition of new poems, and in these pursuits, had his affairs continued prosperous, it is quite possible that the remainder of his life might have been spent. For it is a truism that any large measure of happiness is unfavourable to enterprise, and what young Wilson now really stood in need of was some stimulus to exertion from without. Such stimulus duly arrived, taking the form of what in a worldly sense is known as ruin. To speak more circumstantially, in the fourth year after his marriage, the unencumbered fortune of £50,000 which he had enjoyed from the time of his father's death, was, through the dishonesty of an uncle who had acted as steward of the estate, entirely lost to him.* But, severe

* It is distinctly stated in the *Life*, vol. 1, p. 180, that the loss of fortune was complete; but a subsequent statement is somewhat at variance with this.

as this blow was, his biographers are agreed in pronouncing it to have been a blessing in disguise, and the means of bringing out much that was in the man, which would otherwise in all probability have been lost to the world.

It was now, of course, necessary for him to put his shoulder to the wheel, and, with the exception of Sir Walter Scott, perhaps no man ever rose more manfully or uncomplainingly to the occasion. But between these parallel cases there was one great difference; for Scott's misfortunes fell upon him when he was advanced in years and worn with toil, whilst Wilson was able to bring the prime of youth and strength to bear upon his troubles. He now took up his abode altogether in Edinburgh, being gladly received into the house of his mother,—a lady who to a fine presence and strong and amiable character added notable house-keeping talents, which enabled her during several successive years to accomplish the somewhat difficult and delicate task of making three separate families comfortable and happy under one roof. In the same year, 1815, Wilson was called to the Scots Bar. But, though for a year or two to come he seems to have made a point of staying in Edinburgh whilst the Courts were sitting, a short experience sufficed to convince him that his vocation did not lie in that direction. It was some time before he succeeded in settling down to congenial work, and, indeed, what we hear most of during the next year or so are pedestrian and fishing excursions to the Highlands. Whilst on these expeditions great would be the distances which he compassed on foot, immense the baskets of fish which he brought home. On one of them, he had his wife as his companion, when the happy Bohemianism of the young couple—or, as some

would have it, the poet's eccentricity of conduct—led them into some queer experiences. Among his adventures we may specify a contest in the four manly arts of running, leaping, wrestling, and drinking, with a local champion nicknamed King of the Drovers, in which Wilson came off victorious.

In March 1816 appeared his second volume of verse, entitled *The City of the Plague*. This poem forms a startling contrast to the *Isle of Palms*, for, in place of nature at its softest and sentiment sweet to the point of cloying, we are now presented with the gloomiest and ghastliest of studies in the charnel-house style. Several of the scenes depicting the madness of the London streets at the period of the great pestilential visitation are by no means without a certain power, which, however, inclines to degenerate into violence. Two young sailors—certainly most unlike to all preconceived notions of the seamen of the age of Blake—help to supply the necessary relief and 'sentiment,' of which there is no lack. But, from beginning to end, there is little or nothing truly poetical in the tragedy. The movement of its blank verse is most frequently harsh and jolting, and serves to confirm one in the opinion that the author was well-inspired when he abandoned poetry, as he was now to do. Nor do the minor poems which make up the remainder of the volume show cause for altering this judgment. Certainly they abound, even to excess, in evidence of the love of nature; but that alone never yet made a poet.

The transition which now lay before the author was an abrupt and violent one. From the world of nature and sentiment in which he had hitherto dwelt undisturbed, he found himself summoned to pass into the arena of perio-

dical literature, and that in an age when not only was it the misfortune of such literature to be before all things political, but when political feeling ran to a pitch of which at the present day it is difficult even to form a conception,—when the mere designations Whig and Tory, as mutually applied, were regarded less as party distinctions than as terms of abuse or reproach. And, to add to the contrast which lay before Wilson, the place in which he was called to take this step was precisely that in which the war of periodicals was destined to be waged most keenly. In order properly to understand the circumstances which led to this warfare, it is necessary to go back some years.

The horrors of the French Revolution had been followed in Edinburgh by a strong Tory reaction—a reaction of the excesses of which Henry Cockburn, in his Memorials, has left a highly-coloured and perhaps not unprejudiced account. In 1802, as a counterpoise to overwhelming Tory supremacy, and a rallying-point for those thereto opposed, the *Edinburgh Review* had been established. It was supported by a group of remarkably able young men, whose talents soon raised it to a position of unexampled influence in the world of letters. That it performed excellent service in the cause of enlightenment is undeniable; yet it failed to bear itself with all the moderation proper to success, and in time showed signs of becoming in its turn a tyranny. Those who were opposed to it, whilst regarding as dangerous its opinions in politics and religion, also grew tired (in their own words) of its flippancy and conceit. Now it happened that about this time a certain new magazine, recently founded by a very shrewd and enterprising

Edinburgh publisher, after languishing for some months under incompetent editorship, had reached the very point of dissolution. In this periodical the Tory malcontents saw an instrument ready to their hands. New spirit was infused into its nerveless frame, and in October 1817 appeared the first number of Blackwood's remodelled Edinburgh Magazine. And among those who gave the hot fresh blood of youth to revive its languishing existence, one of the foremost was John Wilson. It may be mentioned that before this he had contributed a literary article to the rival organ, with the presiding genius of which he was on terms of friendship. His new departure led to a rupture of that friendship, but to hold that his acts had committed him to the support of the *Edinburgh Review* would be to put an altogether strained construction upon them.

A detailed history of the stormy first years of the new publication, however piquant and racy it might be made, forms no part of our present scheme. Suffice it to remind the reader that the 'success of scandal' which the magazine at once obtained is matter of notoriety; nor can that success be pronounced undeserved. Indeed the very first number of the new issue, besides scathing articles on Coleridge and Leigh Hunt, contained the celebrated 'Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript'—afterwards suppressed—consisting of a thinly-veiled attack upon a rival magazine, and abounding in gross personalities to the address of leading citizens of Edinburgh. These excesses, though the cause of much heart-burning at the time, can scarcely be pronounced of enduring interest; and it is more profitable, as well as more pleasing, to turn to the other side of the picture. For it must not by any

means be supposed that the new venture relied solely upon objectionable personalities for attracting and holding its readers. 'These,' as Wilson's biographer observes, 'would have excited but a slight and temporary notice, had the bulk of the articles not displayed a rare combination of much higher qualities;' and she goes on to say that whatever subjects were discussed were handled with a masterly vigour and freshness, and developed with a fulness of knowledge and variety of talent that could not fail to command respect even from the least approving critic. Still it is undeniable that for many months to come the series of onslaughts was kept up almost without intermission, whilst even persons locally as highly and as justly respected as Chalmers and Playfair were made to feel the sting of the lash. Consisting as it did of a recrudescence of the discountenanced literary methods of the age of Smollett, all this is regrettable enough, and of much of it there can be little doubt that 'The Leopard'—to give Wilson the name which he bore in the magazine—was art and part. His exact share in productions which were not merely anonymous but of which mystification was an essential feature is impossible to trace; but we are glad at least to have the assurance of his daughter that, amid all the violence of language and extravagance of censure which disfigured his early contributions to the magazine, she has been unable to bring home to his hand 'any instance of unmanly attack, or one shade of real malignity.' Our knowledge of the man's character makes us ready enough to believe that he did not mean to give pain; whilst there is always this excuse—whatever it may be worth—for Maga's early indiscretions: that they were the work of inexperienced men, carried away by the

exuberance of their spirits, and genuinely—if indefensibly—ignorant of the laws of literary good manners, or, as one of themselves has expressed it, of the 'structure and practice of literature' as it existed at that day in Britain. With which reflection, an unthankful subject may be dismissed. For ourselves the real significance of the magazine in its early days consists, not in stories of challenges sent or damages paid, but in the fact that it afforded to John Wilson a first opportunity of giving full and free play to his talents. The characteristic of his genius was not so much *fineness* as abundance, and thus we may believe that his gain from the new stimulus to constant and rapid production more than balanced his loss from absence of opportunities of polishing his work. Certainly from the time of his active and regular employment, he began to throw off those tendencies to affectation and philandering which had characterised his early efforts in the 'Lake' school, and though he never quite lost the habit of as the French say 'caressing his phrase,' he became from henceforth more virile, more himself.

Standing now to all appearance committed to literature as his vocation, in the year 1819 he left his mother's hospitable roof, and removed with his wife and family to a small house of his own, situated in Ann Street, on the outskirts of the town, where, besides having Watson Gordon, the portrait-painter, for his immediate neighbour, he enjoyed the society of Raeburn and Allan among artists, and of Lockhart, Galt, Hogg, and the Hamiltons among literary men.

In April of the year following, by the death of Dr Thomas Brown, the Chair of Moral Philosophy in the

University of Edinburgh became vacant. Wilson thereupon resolved to present himself as a candidate for it, as did Sir William Hamilton, and though the names of other aspirants are mentioned, from the first the real contest lay between these two. They had both been brilliant students at Oxford, but in almost every other respect their qualifications for the coveted post were about as different as could be; for since his college days Hamilton had devoted himself exclusively to the study of philosophy, and had now substantial results of his labours to exhibit, whilst Wilson—though we are expressly told that the study in question had always had a powerful attraction for him—was yet known to the world only as a daring and brilliant littérateur, and a genial and somewhat Bohemian personality. There is no need to say with which of the two, in such a competition, the advantage at first sight seemed to lie. But it is necessary to explain that the election was fought on political grounds, that Hamilton was a Whig, and that the electing body was the Town Council of Edinburgh. It is gratifying to be able to record that the candidates themselves remained upon friendly terms. But never had party-feeling been known to run so high as between their respective adherents,—so that, before the election was over, Wilson had been called on to face charges of being a 'reveller,' which he probably was, a blasphemer, which we cannot think him ever to have been, and a bad husband and father, which he certainly was not. In the end he secured a majority of twelve out of thirty votes; whilst an attempt to set aside his election, which was made at a subsequent meeting of the Council, ignominiously collapsed.

Keenly alive to the responsibilities of a position which

he cannot long have looked forward to occupying, the newly-made Professor at once devoted himself to preparation for the discharge of his duties. Whilst thus engaged, his application was intense,—as well it might be, for it was stipulated that he was to deliver some hundred-and-fifty lectures during the forthcoming Session, and he had but four months in which to prepare them. Native genius, pluck and perseverance, however, carried him triumphantly over every obstacle. His first lecture has thus been described by one who was present on the occasion.*

'There was a furious bitterness of feeling against him among the classes of which probably most of his pupils would consist, and although I had no prospect of being among them, I went to his first lecture prepared to join in a cabal, which I understood was formed to put him down. The lecture-room was crowded to the ceiling. Such a collection of hard-browed, scowling Scotsmen, muttering over their knobsticks, I never saw. The Professor entered with a bold step, amid profound silence. Everyone expected some deprecatory or propitiatory introduction of himself, and his subject, upon which the mass was to decide against him, reason or no reason; but he began in a voice of thunder right into the *matter* of his lecture, kept up unflinchingly and unhesitatingly, without a pause, a flow of rhetoric such as Dugald Stewart or Thomas Brown, his predecessors, never delivered in the same place. Not a word, not a murmur escaped his captivated, I ought to say his conquered, audience, and at the end they gave him a right-down unanimous burst of applause. Those who came to scoff remained to praise.'

And from henceforth the Professor's enemies were silenced.

It can scarcely fail to strike the reader that into Wilson's election to the professorship there had entered not a little of what was casual, or the result of impulse;

* Letter quoted by Mrs Gordon.

still his lucky star must have ruled at the moment, for the sequel far more than justified his rashness. As poet he had been mediocre, and as lawyer 'out of his element,' but there exists abundant testimony to prove that as lecturer and instructor of youth he was the right man in the right place. As was the way of his spirited and generous nature, he threw himself heart and soul into his new work; but though we are assured that his attainments in that department left nothing to be desired, it was far less to these than to character and personality that he owed the success which he undoubtedly won. Certainly philosophers more profound, and probably men of greater general attainments have occupied his Chair, but assuredly never one who united his happy powers of breathing life into the instruction which he imparted and inspiring his scholars with a keen and quickening enthusiasm for himself. And that he succeeded so well in this was perhaps due to the fact that, in addition to his wide and general humanity, there was about him a certain boyishness, which, when joined with the dignity and character of manhood, seldom fails in its appeal to youth.

From among the multitude of pupils who cherished grateful and happy recollections of his class, his biographer has presented us with the testimony of three. The first of these is Hill Burton, the historian of Scotland, who warmly acknowledges his kindness, and whose future eminence the Professor would seem to have divined; for, though at all times accessible to his pupils and conscientious in the discharge of his duties, he appears to have made a friend of Burton almost at the first meeting. Another of his students, Mr Alexander Taylor Innes, has left a picture of North in his lecture-room, from which,

though it belongs by rights to a later date, I make no apology for quoting here.

'His appearance in his class-room,' says that gentleman, 'it is far easier to remember than to forget. He strode into it with the professor's gown hanging loosely on his arms, took a comprehensive look over the mob of young faces, laid down his watch so as to be out of the reach of his sledge-hammer fist, glanced at the notes of his lecture, and then, to the bewilderment of those who had never heard him before, looked long and earnestly out of the north window towards the spire of the old Tron Kirk; until, having at last got his idea, he faced round and uttered it with eye and hand, and voice and soul and spirit, and bore the class along with him. As he spoke the bright blue eye looked with a strange gaze into vacancy, sometimes sparkling with a coming joke, sometimes darkening before a rush of indignant eloquence; the tremulous upper lip curving with every wave of thought or hint of passion, and the golden-grey hair floating on the old man's mighty shoulders—if, indeed, that could be called age which seemed but the immortality of a more majestic youth. And occasionally, in the finer frenzy of his more imaginative passages —as when he spoke of Alexander, clay-cold at Babylon, with the world lying conquered around his tomb, or of the Highland hills, that pour the rage of cataracts adown their riven cliffs, or even of the human mind, with its "primeval granitic truths," the grand old face flushed with the proud thought, and the eyes grew dim with tears and the magnificent frame quivered with a universal emotion.'

Yet another pupil, the Reverend Dr William Smith, of North Leith, has thus recorded his impressions:—

'Of Professor Wilson as a lecturer on Moral Philosophy, it is not easy to convey any adequate idea to strangers,—to those who never saw his grand and noble form excited into bold and passionate action behind that strange, old-fashioned desk, nor heard his manly and eloquent voice sounding forth its stirring utterances with all the strange and fitful cadence of a music quite peculiar to itself. The many-sidedness of the man, and the unconventional character of his prelections, combine to make it exceedingly difficult to define the nature and grounds of his wonderful power as a lecturer. I am certain that if every student who ever attended his class were to place on record his impressions of these, the impressions of each student would be widely

different, and yet they would not, taken all together, exhaust the subject, or supply a complete representation either of his matter or his manner. . . . The roll of papers on which each lecture was written, which he carried into the class-room firmly grasped in his hand, and suddenly unrolled and spread out on the desk before him, commencing to read the same moment, could not fail to attract the notice of any stranger in his class-room. It was composed in large measure of portions of old letters—the addresses and postage-marks on which could be easily seen as he turned the leaf, yet it was equally evident that the writing was neat, careful and distinct ; and, except in a more than usually dark and murk day, it was read with perfect ease and fluency.'

And, in reference to a certain specific lecture, the same gentleman adds, 'The whole soul of the man seemed infused into his subject, and to be rushing forth with resistless force in the torrent of his rapidly-rolling words. As he spoke, his whole frame quivered with emotion. He evidently saw the scene he described, and such was the sympathethic force of his strong poetic imagination, that he made us, whether we would or not, see it too. Now dead silence held the class captive. In the interval of his words you would have heard a pin fall. Again, at some point, the applause could not be restrained, and was vociferous.' The writer concludes by stating that he has heard some of the greatest orators of the day, naming Lords Derby, Brougham, Lyndhurst ; Peel, O'Connell, Sheil, Follett, Chalmers, Caird, Guthrie, M'Neile ; and has heard them 'in their very best styles make some of their most celebrated appearances ; but for popular eloquence, for resistless force, for the seeming inspiration that swayed the soul, and the glowing sympathy that entranced the hearts of his entire audience, that lecture by Professor Wilson far excelled the best of these I ever listened to.'

This, within its proper limits, is the strongest praise. And, on the other hand, we must guard against the supposition that these lectures—highly-coloured and emotional as they undoubtedly were—consisted solely, or even mainly, of oratorical, or conscious or unconscious dramatic display. We are assured that this was by no means the case; that the Professor scorned to sacrifice the serviceable to the ornamental, never for a moment hesitating to grapple with the central difficulties of his subject, or shirking the irksome duty of 'hammering' at them during the greater part of a Session.

Increased financial resources now enabled him to resume occupation of his beloved Elleray, where a new and larger dwelling-house, suitable to the accommodation of a family, had by this time been built. There, many of the intervals of his busy University life were spent in happy domesticity, and there, in 1825, he was visited by Sir Walter Scott, whom he fêted with a brilliant regatta on Windermere. It is to these years of professional duties varied by vacations in the country that his novels and tales belong. They comprise three volumes, and, as their characteristics are identical, may be considered side by side. They consist uniformly of tales of pastoral or humble life, and the author has recorded that his object in writing them was to speak of the 'elementary feelings of the human soul in isolation, under the light of a veil of poetry.' The impression which they produce upon a reader of the present day is that this programme has been but too systematically adhered to. The stories themselves do not lack interest, and their motives are at all times human; but they are deliberately localized in some other world than ours, and if there thence ensues a certain

æsthetic gain, it is accompanied by a more than proportionate loss in vraisemblance and in moral force. To speak more plainly, if the world of Wilson's tales is a better world than ours, it yet remains an artificial one, his stories develope in accordance with the rules of a preconceived ideal, and a weakening of their interest is the result. For though many a writer has seen life in a way of his own, Wilson seems to have deliberately set himself to see it in a way belonging to somebody else. In fact, throughout this series of little books, he aspires to appear in the character of a prose Wordsworth ; but he is a Wordsworth who has lost the noble plainness of his original, and though his actual style is less marred by floridness and redundancy here than elsewhere, still the vices of prettiness, self-consciousness, artificiality, and sentiment suffice to stamp his work as an imitation, decadent from the lofty source of its inspiration.

Of the *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*, a volume of short tales published in 1822, the not impartial author of the biography, writing in the early sixties, remarks that it has acquired a popularity of the most enduring kind—a statement which to-day one would hesitate to endorse. She adds that the stories are 'poems in prose, in which, amid fanciful scenes and characters, the struggles of humanity are depicted with pathetic fidelity, and the noblest lessons of virtue and religion are interwoven, in no imaginary harmony, with the homely realities of Scottish peasant life.' And subject to the not inconsiderable abatements noted above, this may no doubt be accepted.

The Foresters (1825) is the history of the family of one Michael Forester, who is exhibited in turn in his relation as a dutiful son, a kind self-sacrificing brother, a

loving and faithful husband, and a wise affectionate father; whilst from time to time we are also enabled to trace his beneficent influence in the affairs of other members of the small community in which he lives. The tone of the book is peaceful and soothing; it inculcates cheerfulness and resignation, and holds up for our edification a picture of that contentment which springs from the practice of virtue. A group of faultless creatures—for none but the subordinate characters have any faults—pursue the tenor of their lives amid fair scenes of nature, and, when sorrow or misfortune falls to their lot, meet it with an inspiring fortitude. To scoff at such a book were to supply proof of incompetence in criticism—of which the very soul consists in sympathy with all that is sincere in spirit and not inadequate in execution. Yet equally uncritical were it to fail to mark how far short this story falls of the exquisite spontaneity of such work as Goldsmith's immortal essay in the same style.

Possibly, however, of the three volumes, the *Trials of Margaret Lyndsay* (1823) is that which most forcibly conveys the lessons common to all—the teaching of Wordsworth, that is to say, as made plain by a sympathetic disciple. It is the story of a beautiful and virtuous maiden, the daughter of a printer who, having become imbued with the doctrines of Tom Paine, falls into evil courses and is imprisoned on a charge of sedition. His family—consisting of Margaret, her ailing mother, aged grandmother, and two sisters, one of whom is mentally afflicted and the other blind—are in consequence reduced to great poverty, which, supported by their piety, they endure without complaint. Removing from their country home to a dark and narrow street in Edinburgh, they open a small

school, and for a time with fair success make head against their troubles. But misfortune follows relentlessly upon their traces. Lyndsay dies in disgrace, Margaret's sailor sweetheart perishes by drowning, and one after the other she sees the members of the little group which surrounds her removed by death. Still she does not lose heart. Left alone in the world, she is received into the house of a benevolent young lady, and, there, is happy enough, until the undesired attentions of the young lady's brother compel her to seek another home. Journeying alone and on foot, she seeks a refuge with a distant and estranged relation ; by whom she is coldly received, but upon whose withered heart her gentle influence in time works the most happy change. And now, at length, it seems that her hardly-won happiness is to be crowned by marriage to the man of her choice. But what has seemed her good fortune turns out to be in reality the worst of all her woes ; for the brave but dissolute soldier who has won her heart is discovered to possess a wife already. Thus from trial to trial do we follow her, until at last she is left in possession of a very modest share of felicity, whilst from her story we learn the lesson of the duties of courage and cheerfulness, the consolations of virtue, and the healing power of nature.

But of course it is not to the department of fiction that Wilson's most conspicuous literary achievements belong. When once he had settled down into the swing of his professorial duties, his connexion with Blackwood's Magazine was resumed, and his biographer truly remarks that probably no periodical was ever more indebted to one individual than was 'Maga' to Christopher North.

And, in passing, it may be stated that this name, which had at first been assumed by various of the contributors, was soon exclusively associated with himself. As to the number, variety, and extent of his contributions, Mrs Gordon has furnished some curious information. During many years these were never fewer than on an average two to each number; whilst on more than one occasion he produced, within the month, almost the entire contents of an issue. In the year 1830, he contributed in the month of January two articles; in February four; three in March; one each in April and May; four in June; three in July; seven (or 116 pages) in August; one in September; two in October; and one each in November and December—being thirty articles, or one thousand two hundred columns in the year. (Against this, however, there must be set off his extremely liberal quotations from books under review.) The subjects dealt with in the month of August were the following:—'The Great Moray Floods'; 'The Lay of the Desert'; 'The Wild Garland, and Sacred Melodies'; 'Wild Fowl Shooting'; 'Colman's Random Records'; 'Clark on Climate'; 'Noctes, No. 51.' In the year following, by the month of September he had already contributed twenty articles, five of which were in the August number. And, finally, in 1833, he wrote no fewer than fifty-four articles, or upwards of two thousand four hundred closely-printed columns, on politics, and general literature! Nor, when the extraordinary influence and popularity enjoyed by Blackwood's Magazine at that period, and the fact that these were mainly due to Christopher North are borne in mind, will these labours run any risk of being confounded with those of the ordinary literary hack. At the

same time it may be necessary to caution the reader against the oft-repeated error that Wilson was at any time editor of the Magazine.

Of his habits of composition at this the most brilliant and prolific period of his career, his daughter furnishes the following account, from which it will be seen that his literary procedure was ordered with complete disregard to comfort. He was now living in a house which he had built for himself in Gloucester Place, which was to be his home for the remainder of his life.

'The amazing rapidity with which he wrote, caused him too often to delay his work to the very last moment, so that he almost always wrote under compulsion, and every second of time was of consequence. Under such a mode of labour there was no hour left for relaxation. When regularly in for an article for Blackwood, his whole strength was put forth, and it may be said he struck into life what he had to do at a blow. He at these times began to write immediately after breakfast, that meal being despatched with a swiftness commensurate with the necessity of the case before him. He then shut himself into his study, with an express command that no one was to disturb him, and he never stirred from his writing-table until perhaps the greater part of a *Noctes* was written, or some paper of equal brilliancy and interest completed. The idea of breaking his labour by taking a constitutional walk never entered his thoughts for a moment. Whatever he had to write, even though a day or two were to keep him close at work, he never interrupted his pen, saving to take his night's rest, and a late dinner served to him in his study. The hour for that meal was on these occasions nine o'clock ; his dinner then consisted invariably of a boiled fowl, potatoes, and a glass of water—he allowed himself no wine. After dinner he resumed his pen till midnight, when he retired to bed, not unfrequently to be disturbed by an early printer's boy.'

His rapidly turned-out 'copy' would soon cover the table at which he wrote, after which the floor about his feet would be strewn with pages of his MS. 'thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa.' Nor did he, even in

the depth of winter, indulge in a fire in his study, or in any other illumination than that afforded by a tallow candle set in a kitchen candlestick.

In the meantime he had not lost his love of the country and of country pursuits, and we hear of holidays spent at Innerleithen, in Ettrick Forest—where he rented Thirlestane—near Langholm, where his son John was established in a farm, in the Highlands, and in a cruise with an 'Experimental Squadron' of the Navy, during which he was accommodated with a swinging cot in the cockpit of H.M.S. *Vernon*. As is the case in the lives of so many celebrated men, these years, though the most fruitful, were not the most eventful of his life, and therefore call for less detailed examination than those which had preceded them. His character was formed, he was in the full swing of his labours, and the best key to the history of this period is to be found in the study of the *Noctes*, the *Recreations*, and the other works which it produced.

His heroic literary activity was continued down to 1840, in which year he was attacked by a paralytic affection of the right hand, which made writing irksome to him, so that for the next five years he contributed but two papers to the magazine. This ailment was the first warning he received that his wonderful constitution and great physical strength were subject to the universal law. But already the hand of death had been busy among his circle. In 1834 he had lost his esteemed friend Blackwood, in 1835 the Ettrick Shepherd had followed the publisher, whilst in 1837 he sustained the supreme bereavement by losing his beloved and devoted wife. His grief on this occasion was profound and lasting, and a

touching picture of its uncontrollable outbursts in the presence of his class has been preserved. There, if anything occurred to renew the memory of his sorrow, he would pause for a moment or two in his lecture, 'fling himself forward on the desk, bury his face in his hands, and while his whole frame heaved with visible emotion, would weep and sob like a very child.' So, in his work and his play, his joy and his sorrow, the whole man was cast in an heroic mould. And, with that singular but sincere, though oft misunderstood, fantasticness, which in imaginative natures demands the outward visible sign, as long as he lived he continued with scrupulous care the habit of wearing white cambric weepers on the sleeves of his coat or gown, out of respect for the memory of his faithful partner.

The shadows were already falling thick about the lion-like head of the old Professor, and we have now to acknowledge that between his last years and the rest of his life there exists a discrepancy as regrettable as it is unexpected. The highest of animal spirits had been his through the brilliant promise of youth and the happy activity and domesticity of maturity, and when we remember his robust constitution and mellow philosophy, we naturally look forward to see him enjoy a green and peaceful old age. But such prognostications are apt to be fallacious, and the fact stands that his old age was a melancholy one. Nor was its melancholy of that kind, by no means incompatible with a large measure of serenity, which is directly traceable to evils common to all men whose years are prolonged ; it was a peculiar despondency, profound and unexplained. Indeed the last pages of the

Life are sad reading, and we pass hastily over them to the end.

The first symptom of the alteration in his character of which we hear is his sense of loneliness. There was no occasion for him to be lonely, for he was rich in affectionate children and grand-children, yet in spite of these his habits insensibly became solitary, he grew to dislike being intruded upon, and at last was seldom seen in public. Still for a time his broad-brimmed hat with its deep crape band, his flowing locks, and his stately figure buttoned in its black coat, continued to be welcome sights in the streets of Edinburgh, and still he continued, without intermission, his labours among his class, until, in the winter of 1850, an alarming seizure which occurred in his retiring-room at the University compelled him to absent himself from his duties. In the following year he finally retired from the Professorship, which he had held for thirty years, his services being recognized by Government with a pension of £300 a year.

He now felt that his usefulness in life was over, and from henceforth his despondency deepened. We read that 'something of a settled melancholy rested on his spirit, and for days he would scarcely utter a word or allow a smile to lighten up his face;' and, again, that 'long and mournful meditation took possession of him; days of silence revealed the depth of his suffering, and it was only by fits and starts that anything like composure visited his heart.' He himself speaks of his 'hopeless misery.' 'Nothing,' he said to his daughter, 'can give you an idea of how utterly wretched I am; my mind is going, I feel it.' And, indeed, it seems that a gradual

mental decline had set in. But he was spared its progress. On the 1st April 1854, at his house in Gloucester Place, he was attacked by paralysis, and there two days later, mourned by an almost patriarchal family of descendants, he breathed his last.

In the details of his daily life, Wilson was accustomed to follow his own inclinations more than 'tis given to most men to do, his robust individuality disdaining the minor fashions and conventions of the day, whilst his native independence, and still more his love of home, made him completely indifferent to what is known as social success. It is not in the 'great world,' therefore, that we must seek for the traits which characterize him. But a man *is* what he is at home, and within his own sphere Wilson's sympathies were of the widest and deepest. He was adored by every member of his large family, whilst his own large-hearted affection embraced all, down to—or, as perhaps I should say, remembering his special love for young children, up to the youngest babe in the household. Such anecdotes, too, as those told by his daughter of his generous treatment of his defaulting uncle, of his relations with his superannuated henchman, Billy Balmer, or of his sitting up all night at the bedside of an old female servant who was dying, 'arranging with gentle but awkward hand the pillow beneath her head,' or cheering her with encouraging words,—these speak more for the genuine humanity of the man than a thousand triumphs gained in an artificial world.

He also shared with Sir Walter Scott the love of birds and animals of all kinds, from the dog, Rover—one of many dogs—who, crawling upstairs in its last moments, died with its paw in its master's hand, to the sparrow

which inhabited his study for eleven years, and which, boldly perching on his shoulder, would sometimes carry off a hair from his shaggy head to build its nest. In these matters animals have an instinct which rarely misleads them, and that they had good grounds for recognizing a friend in the Professor is proved by the following incident. One afternoon Wilson, then far advanced in life, was observed remonstrating with a carter who was driving an overladen horse through the streets of Edinburgh—

'The carter, exasperated at this interference, took up his whip in a threatening way, as if with intent to strike the Professor. In an instant that well-nerved hand twisted it from the coarse fist of the man, as if it had been a straw, and walking quietly up to the cart he unfastened its *trams*, and hurled the whole weight of coals into the street. The rapidity with which this was done left the driver of the cart speechless. Meanwhile, poor Rosinante, freed from his burden, crept slowly away, and the Professor, still clutching the whip in one hand, and leading the horse in the other, proceeded through Moray Place to deposit the wretched animal in better keeping than that of his driver.'

'This little episode,' adds the writer, 'is delightfully characteristic of his impulsive nature, and the benevolence of his heart.'

Whilst human nature remains what it is, traits of such broad and genial humanity as this are never out of date; but when we turn from the writer to the writings, it is to find the case altered, and ourselves brought face to face with the devastations of time. In the sense of great and immediate effect produced by his work, Wilson was unquestionably the most brilliant, as—excepting the too-fertile Galt—he was the most prolific, of the group of distinguished authors who are here associated with the publishing-house of Blackwood; yet in vitality, in enduring freshness, such a novel as *The Inheritance*, such a

sea-piece as *Tom Cringle's Log*, not to speak of such a character-study as *The Provost*, to-day leaves his work far behind. Of course this is in large measure due to the nature, not to the defects, of that work. North's most distinctive writings were not creative, and in general it is only creative work that lives. The critic's reputation is transitory; Time's revenge deals swiftly, hardly by it; it has none of the phœnix-property of the creator's. Of all our distinguished critical reputations of the last hundred years or so, how many now survive? To-day the critic Johnson is remembered chiefly for blindness, the critic Jeffrey for overweening self-confidence when he was wrong, the critic Macaulay for idle rhetoric and for consistent failure to strike the mark. The appreciator Lamb is almost alone in holding his own. And there is not one reader in a thousand who has time, or cares, for the purely historical task of looking closer, of studying these eminent writers in relation to the age in which they lived, and of estimating accordingly the services which they performed. Christopher North, in so far as he was a critic, has not escaped the common doom. Scattered over the pages of the *Noctes*, there are no doubt some shrewd and pregnant observations upon writers and upon literature. But these sparse grains of salt are not enough to preserve the general fabric from decay; whilst the more numerous errors of judgment in which his work abounds require no pointing out. As a reviewer North was not lacking in discrimination, as may be seen in the historical though generally misconceived essay on Tennyson; and, granted a really good opportunity —as in the case of that completion of *Christabel* which was to Martin Tupper the pastime of some idle days—no

man knew better how to avail himself of it. The pages signed by him also afford abundant evidence of the gentleness, generosity, and enthusiasm of his spirit. But when so much has been said, what remains to be added? Of stimulus to the reader, of conspicuous insight into the subject discussed, we find but little.

Turning to the essays, collected under the title of 'Recreations of Christopher North,' we sometimes see the author to better advantage, as, for instance, when he dons his 'Sporting Jacket,' and recounts in mock-heroic style the Sportsman's Progress. The subject was one which keenly appealed to him, rousing all the enthusiasm of his perfervid nature, and some very bright and characteristic pages are the result.

His hero is fishing, and has hooked a fish.

'But the salmon has grown sulky, and must be made to spring to the plunging stone. There, suddenly, instinct with new passion, she shoots out of the foam like a bar of silver bullion; and, relapsing into the flood, is in another moment at the very head of the waterfall! Give her the butt—give her the butt—or she is gone for ever with the thunder into ten fathom deep!—Now comes the trial of your tackle—and when was Phin ever known to fail at the edge of cliff or cataract? Her snout is southwards—right up the middle of the main current of the hill-born river, as if she would seek its very source where she was spawned! She still swims swift, and strong, and deep—and the line goes steady, boys, steady—stiff and steady as a Tory in the roar of Opposition. There is yet an hour's play in her dorsal fin—danger in the flap of her tail—and yet may her silver shoulder shatter the gut against a rock. Why, the river was yesterday in spate, and she is fresh run from the sea. All the lesser waterfalls are now level with the flood, and she meets with no impediment or obstruction—the coast is clear—no tree-roots here—no floating branches—for during the night they have all been swept down to the salt loch. *In medio tutissimus ibis*—ay, now you feel she begins to fail—the butt tells now every time you deliver your right. What! another mad leap! yet another sullen plunge! She seems absolutely to have

discovered, or rather to be an impersonation of, the Perpetual Motion. Stand back out of the way, you son of a sea-cook!—you in the tattered blue breeches, with the tail of your shirt hanging out. Who the devil sent you all here, ye vagabonds?—Ha! Watty Ritchie, my man, is that you? God bless your honest laughing phiz! What, Watty, would you think of a Fish like that about Peebles? Tam Grieve never gruppit sae heavy a ane since first he belanged to the Council.—Curse that collie! Ay! well done, Watty! Stone him to Stobbo. Confound these stirks—if that white one, with caving horns, kicking heels, and straight-up tail, come bellowing by between us and the river, then "Madam! all is lost, except honour!" If we lose this Fish at six o'clock, then suicide at seven. Our will is made—ten thousand to the Foundling—ditto to the Thames Tunnel ——ha—ha—my Beauty! Methinks we could fain and fond kiss thy silver side, languidly lying afloat on the foam as if all further resistance now were vain, and gracefully thou wert surrendering thyself to death! No faith in female—she trusts to the last trial of her tail—sweetly workest thou, O Reel of Reels! and on thy smooth axle spinning sleep'st, even, as Milton describes her, like our own worthy planet. Scrope—Bainbridge—Maule—princes among Anglers—oh! that you were here! Where the devil is Sir Humphrey? At his retort? By mysterious sympathy—far off at his own Trows, the Kerss feels that we are killing the noblest Fish whose back ever rippled the surface of deep or shallow in the Tweed. Tom Purdy stands like a seer, entranced in glorious vision, beside turreted Abbotsford. Shade of Sandy Govan! Alas! alas! Poor Sandy—why on thy pale face that melancholy smile!—Peter! The Gaff! The Gaff! Into the eddy she sails, sick and slow, and almost with a swirl—whitening as she nears the sand—there she has it—struck right into the shoulder, fairer than that of Juno, Diana, Minerva, or Venus—and lies at last in all her glorious length and breadth of beaming beauty, fit prey for giant or demigod angling before the Flood!'

Nor are his pictures of Coursing and of Fox-Hunting less good. But anon his overladen style crops out again, as in this passage, where he has just discharged his gun into the midst of a flock of wild-duck afloat upon a loch:—

'Now is the time for the snow-white, here and there ebon-spotted Fro—who with burning eyes has lain couched like a spaniel, his quick

breath ever and anon trembling on a passionate whine, to bounce up, as if discharged by a catapulta, and first with immense and enormous high-and-far leaps, and then, fleet as any greyhound, with a breast-brushing brattle down the brae, to dash, all-fours, like a flying squirrel fearlessly from his tree, many yards into the bay with one splashing and momentarily disappearing spang, and then, head and shoulders and broad line of back and rudder tail, all elevated above or level with the wavy water-line, to mouth first that murdered mawsey of a mallard, lying as still as if she had been dead for years, with her round, fat, brown bosom towards heaven—then that old Drake, in a somewhat similar posture, but in more gorgeous apparel, his belly being of a pale grey, and his back delicately pencilled and crossed with numberless waved dusky-lines—precious prize to one skilled like us in the angling art—next—nobly done, glorious Fro—that cream-colour-crowned widgeon, with bright rufus chestnut breast, separated from the neck by loveliest waved ash-brown and white lines, while our mind's eye feasteth on the indescribable and changeable green beauty-spot of his wings—and now, if we mistake not, a Golden Eye, best described by his name—finally, that exquisite little duck the Teal; yes, poetical in its delicately pencilled spots as an Indian shell, and when kept to an hour, roasted to a minute, gravied in its own wild richness, with some few other means and appliances to boot, carved finely—most finely—by razor-like knife, in a hand skilful to dissect and cunning to divide—tasted by a tongue and palate both healthily pure as the dewy petal of a morning rose—swallowed by a gullet felt gradually to be extending itself in its intense delight—and received into a stomach yawning with greed and gratitude,—Oh! surely the thrice-blessed of all web-footed birds; the apex of Apician luxury; and able, were anything on the face of this feeble earth able, to detain a soul, on the very brink of fate, a short quarter of an hour from an inferior Elysium!'

In point of style could anything well be much worse? Even the far-famed *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, by much the most celebrated of Wilson's writings, though they may still be dipped into with pleasure, will scarcely stand critical examination nowadays. Of course, from their very nature, they have come to labour under the disadvantage of being largely concerned with topics and persons of long since exhausted

interest. And, again, their convivial setting, which pleased in its own day, is now probably by many looked upon askance, and that, it must be confessed, not without some show of excuse. If this were all, it would be well. As we have seen, Wilson wrote his dialogues hastily and presumably wrote them for the moment, so that to judge them as permanent contributions to literature is to judge them by a standard contemplated not by the author, but by his injudicious critics. Amongst these, Professor Ferrier, in his introductory critique to the authoritative edition of the *Noctes*, published forty years ago, most confidently claims that they possess solid and lasting qualities, and in the front rank of these qualities he places humour and dramatic power. Now to us, except in outward form, the *Noctes* appear almost anything rather than dramatic; they are even less dramatic than the conversation-pieces of Thomas Love Peacock. It is true that of the two principal talkers one speaks Scotch and the other English; but in every other respect they might exchange almost any of their longest and most important speeches without the smallest loss to characterisation. The same authority (I use the word in a purely empirical sense) enthusiastically lauds the creation of The Shepherd; and upon him it is true that, by dint of insistence on two or three superficial mannerisms, a certain shadowy individuality has been conferred. But surely it is needless to point out that a label is not a personality, and that this sort of thing is something quite apart from dramatic creation. The critic then goes on to say that 'in wisdom the Shepherd equals the Socrates of Plato; in humour he surpasses the Falstaff of Shakespeare.' The last part of the sentence strikes us as even more surprising than the first, for had our opinion of the

imaginary revellers at Ambrose's been asked we should have had to confess that, though they possess high spirits in abundance and a certain sense of the ludicrous, of humour in the true sense—of the humour, I won't say of a Sterne, but of a Michael Scott—all are alike entirely destitute. And one may even add that with persons of equally high spirits such is almost always the case. Well then, it may be asked, if they lack both humour and dramatic power, in what qualities, pray, do these world-famed dialogues excel? The answer is, of course, that in brilliant intellectual and rhetorical display the *Noctes* are supreme. Yet here, also, there is often about them something too much of deliberate and self-conscious fine-writing. And yet, even to-day, when tastes have changed and fashions altered, the exuberance of their eloquence is hard to withstand, and in reading them we sometimes almost believe that we are touched when in reality we are merely dazzled. This dazzling quality is not one of the highest in literature: with the single possible exception of Victor Hugo, the greatest writers have always been without it. But it pervades, floods, overwhelms the *Noctes*. It is a somewhat barren, and unendearing quality at best; yet, after all, it is an undoubted manifestation of intellectual power; and whatever it may be worth, let us give Wilson full credit for having excelled in it.

One last word. The literary workman has no more unpleasing task to perform than that of so-called destructive criticism; but if Wilson himself, as apart from his writings, be indeed, as we believe him to be, an immortal figure, by releasing him from the burden of ill-judged praise which like a mill-stone hangs about his neck, and by setting him in his true light, we shall have done

him no disservice. On the poetic imagination, then, he looms as one heroically proportioned; whilst more practical thinkers will cherish his memory as that of a most brilliant contributor to the periodical literature of his day, a great inspirer of youth, and a standard and pattern to his countrymen of physical and intellectual manhood.

JOHN GALT

THROUGH life the subject of this sketch was unfortunate; nor has posthumous justice redressed the balance in his favour. His fellow-countrymen and fellow-craftsmen, Scott and Smollett—with whom, if below them, he is not unworthy to be mentioned—have long since been accorded high rank among the great novelists of English literature: Galt remains in obscurity. And yet it is easy to understand how his qualities have failed of recognition. For though his character was in the ordinary sense of the word exemplary, his genius extraordinary, yet in either there was something lacking. Indeed the study of his life and works reveals almost as much to be blamed as to be praised.

John Galt was born at Irvine, in Ayrshire, on the 2nd May, 1779, in that humbler station of society, which—in so far as it dispenses with screens and concealments, and so brings a child the sooner face to face with life as it is—may be considered favourable to genius. In childhood he was of infirm constitution and somewhat effeminate disposition—defects which were, however, in due course amply rectified. At this time his passion for flowers and for music gave evidence of a sensibility which, if one is loth to condemn it as unwholesome, is at least of doubtful

augury for happiness in a workaday world. To these affections he joined the love of ballads and story-books—in the midst of which he would often pass the day in lounging upon his bed. Nor did oral tradition fail him; for, frequenting the society of the indigent old women of the locality, from their lips he would drink in to his heart's content that lore of a departing age which he afterwards turned to such good account in his works. To his own mother, whom nature had gifted with remarkable mental powers, and in particular with a strong sense of humour and a faculty of original expression, his debt was admitted to be great. Not unnaturally Mrs Galt at first strenuously opposed her son's bookish propensities, though it is recorded that she lived to regret having done so. The father, who by profession was master of a West Indiaman, though, in his son's words, 'one of the best as he was one of the handsomest of men,' does not appear in mind and force of character to have risen above mediocrity.

The most striking incident in the childhood of the future novelist is his association with the 'Buchanites,' a religious sect who took their name from a demented female, Mrs Buchan. It happened that this person had been much impressed by the preaching of Mr White, the Relief Minister of Irvine, and had followed him from Glasgow to that place, where some weak-headed members of the congregation mistook her ravings for inspiration, and made her warmly welcome. White himself participated in their delusion, and when authoritatively required to dismiss his adherent, chose rather to resign his church. From this time meetings would be held in a tent, generally in the night time, and there Mrs Buchan would hold

forth, announcing herself to be the woman spoken of in the twelfth chapter of the Revelations, and Mr White as the man-child whom she had brought forth. The proceedings attracted public attention, rioting followed, and it was found advisable to expel the evangelists from the town. Some forty or fifty disciples accompanied their exodus, who sang as they went, and declared themselves *en route* for the New Jerusalem, and in the company of the crack-brained enthusiasts went the infant Galt, his imagination captivated by the strangeness of their doings. He had not proceeded far, however, ere that sensible woman, his mother, pounced upon him and bore him off home. Nevertheless the wild psalmody of the occasion abode in his memory, and when in later life, in his fine novel of *Ringan Gilhaize*, he came to describe the Covenanters, the recollection stood him in good stead. It is also recorded of him that, after reading Pope's Iliad, he was so deeply impressed by the book as to kneel then and there, and humbly and fervently pray that it might be vouchsafed to him to accomplish something equally great. It must not be thought, however, that in him imagination predominated to the exclusion of everything else. On the contrary, to the love of what was beautiful or strange, he united a pronounced mechanical and engineering turn, which led him, among other undertakings, to construct an Æolian harp, and to devise schemes for improving the water-supply of Greenock, the town to which his family had in the meantime removed. Thus was first manifested that diversity of faculty which enabled him in later life with equal ease to pourtray men and manners and to found cities and subdue wastes.

Meantime his education, which had been begun at home and continued at the grammar-school of Irvine, was carried on at Greenock, where it was supplemented with advantage by independent reading in a well-chosen public library. In Greenock, also, where he spent some fifteen years, he was fortunate in having as associates a group of young men whom the spirit of intellectual emulation characterised, and of whom more than one was destined to attain distinction. Among these were Eckford, who is referred to as the future architect and builder of the United States' Navy, and Spence, afterwards the author of a treatise on Logarithmic Transcendents. But undoubtedly young Galt's most congenial companion was one James Park, a youth of elegant and scholarly tastes, who shared in his passion for the *belles-lettres*, and criticised in a friendly spirit the attempts which he was now beginning to make as a poet. Would that this young man's influence had been exerted to greater effect, for he seems to have been just the sort of mentor of whom Galt stood in need, and whose discipline throughout life he missed! 'He seemed,' says the *Autobiography*, 'to consider excellence in literature as of a more sacred nature than ever I did, who looked upon it but as a means of influence.' A means of influence! One would gladly believe this but the querulous insincere utterance of a disappointed man. Unhappily evidence is but too abundant that Galt was consistently lacking in the respect due to his high calling. Among his earliest poetical efforts was a tragedy on the life of Mary Queen of Scots, and in course of time he began to contribute to the local newspaper and to the *Scots Magazine*. With Park and other young men he also joined in essay and debating societies, a recrea-

tion which they varied by walking-tours to Edinburgh, Loch Lomond, the Border Counties, and elsewhere. Before this time he had been placed in the Custom House at Greenock, to acquire some training as a clerk, whence in due course he was transferred to work in a mercantile office. It was the period of the resumption of the war with France, and he took a leading part in the movement for forming local companies of volunteer riflemen.

This period of his adolescence strikes one as having been unusually prolonged. It came to a sudden and violent end. It appears that about this time a set of purse-proud upstarts, who stood much in need of schooling in more ways than one, had made their appearance in Glasgow. In relation to some matter of business, one of these had addressed an insolent letter to the firm with which Galt was connected. It was delivered into his hands. On discovering its contents his indignation was boundless, and he proceeded to action with all the impetuosity of a Hotspur. Missing the writer in Glasgow, he straightway tracked him to his quarters in Edinburgh, and having bolted the door of the room in which he sat, forced from him a written apology. So much was satisfactory; but the turmoil excited in the young man's brain did not subside immediately. He did not return to his employment, but, after spending some time in an indeterminate sort of fashion, set off for London 'to look about him.' In the *Autobiography*, written when he was old and an invalid, all this is detailed in a loose and cursory manner. There is no reference to emotion or the inner life, and the style is that of one who, having written many books, is grown very tired of writing. To

the reader this is the reverse of stimulating; yet whatever may be stated and whatever kept back, we may feel sure that, in so emotional and imaginative a man, an intense inner life must have existed, and one in all probability not of the smoothest. At the time of leaving home, however, the writer acknowledges to having felt exceedingly depressed. Then follows a description of sensations experienced, whilst horses were being changed, on the road between Greenock and Glasgow. His father accompanied him on his journey.

'I walked back on the fields,' says the young man, 'alone, with no buoyant heart. The view towards Argyleshire, from the brow of the hill, is perhaps one of the most picturesque in the world. I have since seen some of the finest scenes, but none superior. At the time it seemed as if some pensive influence rested on the mountains, and silently allured me back; and this feeling was superstitiously augmented by my happening in the same moment to turn round and behold the eastern sky, which lay in the direction of my journey, sullenly overcast. On returning to the inn, the horses had been some time in harness, and my father was a little impatient at my absence, but conjecturing what was passing in my mind, said little; nor did we speak much to each other till the waiter of the inn opened the door for us to alight at Glasgow. In truth I was not blind to the perils which awaited me, but my obstinacy was too indulgently considered.' The above reads like a passage from *The Omen.* In it we see the true Galt, or at least one side of him—brooding, fantastic, the devotee of mysticism, discerning, at this momentous point in his career, the finger of fate where another would have seen but an ordinary process of nature!

As to the time he now spent in London, beyond an incidental admission that it was one of the least satisfactory periods of his career, Galt does not take us into his confidence. One guesses that had he consulted his own feelings only, he would have enjoyed the luxury of writing Confessions. But, after all, he was a Scotchman, though an unusual variety of the class, and Scotchmen do not indulge in luxuries of that kind. His Autobiography, when it came to be written, was in the main a piece of book-making; certainly it has nothing of the confessional character, and, indeed, what of self-revelation he at this time supplies must be sought in his letters to Park.

He had brought with him to the metropolis a goodly number of introductions, which procured him much civility but nothing more. Whilst waiting, however, to see what was to be done for him in the shape of practical assistance, he employed himself in preparing for the press a poem which had been inspired by his studies in antiquarianism, and written some time earlier. The title of this production was *The Battle of Largs*, and its theme the invasion of Scotland by Haco, King of Norway, in the year 1263,—a subject which had already prompted the Titanic suggestions of Lady Wardlaw's *Hardyknute*. The poem, as it survives in extracts, is turgid, crude, and immature, exhibiting the exact reverse of what is desirable in poetry—to wit, a great expenditure of means to produce a very small result. For 'tis in vain we are assured that desperate deeds are doing if we find it possible to remain completely unmoved. A strain of somewhat similar kind was afterwards taken up by Motherwell, and by Tom Stoddart in the unbridled fantasy of his only half-serious 'Necromaunt,' called *The Death-Wake*.

To do Galt justice, he quickly realised that he had mounted the wrong Pegasus, and almost immediately suppressed his poem. He acted wisely, and here once for all it may be admitted that, in the specialised sense of the term, he was no poet. Fancy, imagination, dramatic power, and many another fine attribute of the poet he of course possessed in high degree, but, whether because lacking the 'accomplishment of verse,' or for some other reason, he failed to give expression to these gifts in poetry. Metre seems to have impeded rather than assisted him, and he is most poetic when writing in prose—a conclusion suggested by the poem now under consideration, and borne out by his *Star of Destiny*, his posthumous *Demon of Destiny*, and his poetic plays. From his own frank avowal that, when drawing up a list of his works for publication, an epic* was overlooked, we judge that not much of the labour of the file was expended upon his verse.

He waited for some months in London, whiling away the time, as he pretends, by dabbling in astrology, alchemy, and other studies which served to feed his love of the occult, and then at last, in despair, decided to shift for himself. This led to his entering into partnership with a young Scotchman named M'Lachlan, in a business which, for reasons unknown, is mentioned only under the vague name of a 'commercial enterprise.' Whatever may have been its nature, for Galt this undertaking started badly, and after a period of better success, at the end of three years ended in bankruptcy. The precise steps by which this final consummation was reached are carefully detailed by Galt, yet to

* *The Crusade.*

minds unversed in commercial procedure they remain very far from clear. In general terms, however, we gather that the failure was due to the dishonesty of a debtor, occurring in conjunction with a succession of financial misfortunes.

Having failed in commerce, Galt's next thought was of the Law. He entered himself of Lincoln's Inn, and whilst waiting to be formally called to the Bar, went abroad in the hope of improving his health, which was not good at the time. He tells us that by this time he had realised that, without friends, there is no such thing as 'getting on' in life possible. These he was conscious of lacking, and when he now turned his back on England it was, in his own words, half desiring that no event might occur to make him ever wish to return. He betook himself in the first instance to Gibraltar, where, in the well-known Garrison Library, he had his first glimpse of a young man whose feelings, had they been revealed, might have been found to tally strangely with his own. Lord Byron, at that time known only as the author of a mordant satire, was starting upon the tour which was so soon to make him famous, and as Galt had him and Hobhouse for fellow-travellers to Malta and Sicily, he got to know them fairly well. It is noticeable that his first impressions of the Pilgrim betray prejudice; and that long afterwards, when he was called on to be his biographer, he complains that Moore's portrait reveals only the sunny side of his lordship's character, and is 'too radiant and conciliatory.'

After visiting Malta and Sicily, Galt proceeded to Athens. His active mind, abhorring idleness, was soon at work again. It may be remembered that this was the period of Buonaparte's endeavour to enforce his nefarious

Berlin and Milan Decrees, which had been designed with the object of annihilating British commerce. Our traveller now conceived the idea that they might be evaded by introducing British goods into the Continent through Turkey. And here it may be noted that his biographers have united in representing this scheme as the object of his going abroad, whereas he himself distinctly, though incidentally, states that he left England for the benefit of his health,* and that his scheme first occurred to him when at Tripolizza.† This fact, immaterial in itself, is of importance as affording evidence that his circumstances at the time were fairly easy; for his travels must have been costly, yet they do not appear to have brought him in any return until after his written account of them had been published, when he was recouped for the whole, or a part, of his outlay.

In pursuance of the newly-devised scheme, it was now his object to find a locality where a depôt of goods might be established. For this purpose, after visiting various out of the way places, he selected Mykoni, an island of the Archipelago, which possessed an excellent harbour, where he acquired a large building, suited for a storehouse, which had originally been erected by Orloff at a time when the Empress Catherine the Second had designs on these islands. Hence, in the summer of 1810, he returned to Malta, to make known and to develope his scheme, and whilst awaiting the result of communications with England, he filled up the time with further travels, visiting Constantinople and Widdin. Turkey was now in arms against Russia, and in the course of his present journey, which was performed in wintry weather, he saw

* *Literary Life*, p. 79. † *Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 147.

something of the hardships as well as of the pomp of war. Without presuming to question that he kept business in view—as possibly also did George Borrow in his rambles in Spain — we note the fact that in his own account of his travels the details of his specific labours are kept well in the background, if not indeed out of sight. At the worst his journeys, which led him through some singularly wild and little known parts of the globe, by bringing him acquainted with many picturesque and unusual characters, must have been rich in suggestions of adventure and romance; and, indeed, there is evidence that some of his experience of primitive and martial life acquired at this time was afterwards turned to account in painting similar life at home for his historical novels. His expectations of patronage for his project were, however, disappointed, and he resolved to return without delay to England, in the hope of there finding support for it. In the meantime literature had not been entirely neglected. Keeping his eyes well about him, he had amassed the notes on which were subsequently based his *Voyages*, and *Letters from the Levant*; whilst a translation from Goldoni, executed in a single wet day at Missolonghi, and published in the 'New British Theatre' as *The Word of Honour*, together with the tragedy of *Maddalen*, composed whilst undergoing quarantine at Messina, belong also to this time.

Back in London, he had the mortification of finding his commercial scheme—as to the presumptive value of which one would wish to have specialist opinion—regarded coldly by the Foreign Office, whilst at the same time he seems to have satisfied himself of the inutility of proceeding further in his legal career. But, whatever may have

been his defects, want of resourcefulness was certainly not among them. An outburst of literary industry followed, and the year 1812 saw the publication of his Voyages and Travels, his Life of Wolsey, and his Tragedies. But in justice to one who has sins enough of slipshod composition to answer for, it must be stated that most of the Life of Wolsey—one of the most carefully composed of his books—had been written at an earlier date.

Of his *Voyages and Travels in the years* 1809, 1810, *and* 1811, *containing statistical, commercial, and miscellaneous observations on Gibraltar, Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, Cerigo and Turkey*, a competent critic remarks that, 'while containing some interesting matter, they are disfigured by grave faults of style and by rash judgments.' The public received them favourably, but a contemptuous notice in the *Quarterly Review* was warmly resented by the author.

It was whilst standing in the quadrangle of Christchurch College, when on a visit to Oxford, that Galt had conceived the idea of his *Life of Wolsey*. He had worked hard at the book before he went abroad, and he claimed that it embodied new views, and the results of much original research. Notwithstanding this, the *Quarterly Review* assailed him again, and this time so libellously as to lead him to think of a criminal prosecution. He, however, dropped the idea, with the result that when his Tragedies saw the light, the persecution—now as in the case of the Travels conducted by Croker in person—was renewed with additional pungency. In the general form of his *Maddalen, Agamemnon, Lady Macbeth, Antonia, and Clytemnestra*, the author followed Alfieri, whose works he had studied abroad and admired enthusiastically, though

with reservations. The plays are of a tentative character, and certainly do not deserve Scott's condemnation as the 'worst ever seen.' *Lady Macbeth*, which the author thought the 'best or the worst' of the series, though not lacking in imaginative touches, is without progression or story, and besides provoking irresistible comparisons, fails by ending just where it began. And whilst on the subject of Galt's drama, we may mention *The Witness*, the most important of several plays contributed by him to the 'New British Theatre,' a publication undertaken by Colbourn at his instigation. Here the dramatist had a powerfully dramatic if also a somewhat inconsequent story to work upon—a subject, in fact, after his own heart. Unfortunately the execution of the piece is hasty, and by no means equal to its conception. It was performed for some nights in Edinburgh as *The Appeal*, when Scott wrote an Epilogue for it, said to be the only piece of humorous verse existing from his pen. Galt himself rehandled the subject in narrative form, under the title of *The Unguarded Hour*.

He now embarked on a journalistic enterprise, assuming for a time the editorship of the *Political Review*. But the work did not suit him. After about a month he began to tire of it, and it was soon abandoned. He also contributed lives of Hawke, Byron, and Rodney, to an edition of Campbell's *Lives of the Admirals*; whilst, in 1813, his *Letters from the Levant* made their appearance. These contain 'views of the state of society, manners, opinions, and commerce, in Greece and several of the principal islands of the Archipelago,' and had actually been written as letters at the places from which they are dated, being subsequently but little altered.

Perhaps we have already seen enough of the subject of this sketch to convince us that any lengthy perseverance in one course of conduct must not be expected of him, and, sure enough, the next thing we hear of him is that he is bound for Gibraltar, on another commercial enterprise. Before setting out, he had taken occasion to revisit the scenes of his early years, going in turn to every place which he remembered having frequented, even to the churchyard, amid whose tombstones, like his own Andrew Wylie, he had haunted as a boy. Taking stock of himself and his surroundings, he tells us that he was sensible of change everywhere, but nowhere more than in his own hopes. 'I saw that a blight had settled on them, and that my career must in future be circumscribed and sober.' When it is remembered that he was now touching upon what is called the prime of life, his tone of disillusion is pathetic.

He had gone to Gibraltar as the emissary of Kirkman Finlay—a Glasgow merchant, who afterwards bore a spirited part in the Greek War of Independence—with a view to ascertain the feasibility of smuggling British goods into Spain. But the victories of the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula were unfavourable to his mission, and much against his will he found himself compelled to return to England, having accomplished nothing, to seek surgical treatment for a painful malady from which he was now suffering. Whilst in London he was married, his wife being the daughter of a Dr Tilloch, editor of the *Philosophical Magazine*, to which Galt was an occasional contributor. His marriage was a very happy one, and on the principle, perhaps, that the happiest countries have no history, his married life is not referred

to in the biographies. In 1814, at the time of the Restoration in France, we find him visiting Holland and that country, with a view to promote yet another 'abortive scheme.'

It had now become imperative that he should exert himself, and having, as one may say, nothing better to do on his return from the Continent, he resumed the labours of the pen. His first known work of fiction was the result. It was entitled *The Majolo*, founded upon a Sicilian superstition, and published anonymously in 1816. It was a favourite with its author, and has been described as a 'strange flighty production, enjoyed only by a few peculiar minds.' With it may be mentioned *The Earthquake*, a three-volume novel written in 1820, and founded on the Messina earthquake of 1783. The latter, though an extravagant and ill-constructed story, is said to describe Sicilian habits and sentiments with accuracy. *The Majolo* was followed in the same year by the earlier instalment of a *Life of Benjamin West*, compiled from materials supplied by the painter himself—a work which was completed four years later, after his death. Then the eternal commercial scheme cropped up again. This time it emanated from Glasgow, leading Galt to move with his family to Finnart, near Greenock, where he spent a period afterwards characterised as the most unsatisfactory in his whole life. As usual the scheme in which he was interested failed, and he returned to London, having accepted employment from the Union Canal Company, in order to assist the passing through Parliament of a bill promoted by that body. This being accomplished, he returned to the drudgery of the desk, and, first and last, turned out a portentous body of hack-work, the various

items of which need not be catalogued. Fortunately for himself, if not always for his reader, he had the strength and *insouciance* under labour of what he physically was, a giant. Among the tasks performed at this time were the fascinating, if fabulous, Pictures from English, Scottish, and Irish History; *The Wandering Jew*, described as a 'conglomerate of history, biography, travel, and descriptive geography,' and a collection of 'All the Voyages round the World'—the last issued under the pen-name of Samuel Prior.

This record of futile commercial enterprise, varied by uninspiring literary work, constitutes dull reading; fortunately a happier period is now reached. In 1820, Mr Blackwood accepted *The Ayrshire Legatees* for his magazine, and this book proved to be Galt's first real literary success. Perhaps it is also the first deliberate attempt in our literature to delineate, for their own sake, contemporary Scottish manners and character. It will be seen that the mechanism of the story, though of the simplest, is well contrived for supplying to these the necessary relief. Dr Pringle, the minister of a secluded rural parish in Ayrshire, having to his surprise been appointed residuary legatee of a wealthy Indian cousin deceased, betakes himself to London to attend to his affairs in person. He is accompanied by his wife and family—the latter consisting of a son just called to the Scottish bar, and a daughter. The Scottish characters are thus detached against an English background, and the letters in which they describe their experiences in the metropolis to their several correspondents at home make up the staple of the book. The characters of this little group—of the simple, but truly pious and kind-hearted minister, with his sturdy presbyterianism and quaint

traditional phraseology of the pulpit; of that notable managing woman his spouse, like whom there was not another within the jurisdiction of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr; and of the really able and acute young advocate, with his Scottish magniloquence, and his pose as a man of the world even whilst betraying his inexperience—all these are well conceived and well drawn, their unconscious self-revelation being cleverly and naturally managed. The high-flown and romantic young lady, who so soon adapts herself to her new circumstances, though a pleasing enough portrait, is less distinctively Scottish than the rest. Fragments of narrative interpolated among the letters serve to introduce us to the audience before whom these are read out, and at the same time to present a second series of slighter, though not less racy, character-sketches. The hint of the book, with its unanswered correspondence, is obviously drawn from *Humphrey Clinker*, and, as in that masterpiece, real persons and events—such as the funeral of George the Third and the trial of Queen Caroline, Braham the singer and Sir Francis Burdett—supply much of the epistolary subject-matter. As in Smollett's novel, too, the same subjects are at times discussed in turn by the different writers—a plan which, though it serves the purpose of contrasting character, is not entirely free from objection.

The Ayrshire Legatees was followed in the next year by the yet more original *Annals of the Parish*. The history of the growth of this book is identical with that of *Waverley*—it had been begun years before, laid aside, and then resumed and completed—only that Galt has told us that his reason for discontinuing it was that he had been assured that a Scotch novel had no chance of success—an assurance which the case of *Waverley* has proved untrue. The

Annals stands in somewhat the same relation to Scott's novel as does a Dutch to an Italian masterpiece, a tale of Crabbe's to an Elizabethan tragedy. It is given out as an account of the ministry of Micah Balwhidder, parish priest of Dalmailing (Dreghorn), written by himself. Mr Balwhidder had happened to be inducted on the very day on which King George the Third came to the throne; and, irrespective of its merit as a work of fiction, his narrative possesses real historical value as a record of the progress of a rural parish during the half-century succeeding that event. Indeed, with some omissions, the book might almost be printed as an appendix to the old Statistical Account of the parishes of Scotland, drawn up by the ministers. When rumours of great events—such as the American War of Independence or the French Revolution—reach the secluded hamlet, their sound is softened and their influence subdued. But the records of such local matters as floods and bad seasons, improvement of land, making of roads and planting of hedges, development of mineral resources, and so on, are also in their degree the stuff of which history is made, and as here set down they are worthy the attention of an Arthur Young. Then we are incidentally informed of the fluctuations of prices, of the rise of new industries, and the change of fashions—information which to the ordinary novel-reader would appear dry, but for the human and personal interest by which it is pervaded. For the history of the parishioners is interwoven with that of the parish, and over the whole is cast the charm of the kindly Doric and the simple and guileless personality of the minister. In theory an uncompromising stickler for orthodoxy of doctrine, and a terror to evil-doers in the abstract, Mr Balwhidder's instinct is wiser than his

creed, and where the two are at variance the stronger insensibly gains the day. The tone of his fragmentary narrative is of itself proof sufficient of his fatherly interest in his villagers. And among those villagers, or at least within the narrow bounds of his parish, he can exhibit a sufficiently motley and picturesque variety in character and the experience of life. First of all we have Lord Eaglesham, the kind landlord, genial gentleman and free liver; Mr Cayenne, the irascible business-man, whose bark is worse than his bite, and Lady Macadam, the flighty and high-handed Great Lady of the old school. Then there is Mrs Malcolm, the pattern widow left with a large young family, her son Charles, the frank sailor, and her handsome daughter Kate; old Nanse Banks, the school-mistress, and her more advanced successor, Miss Sabrina Hookey; Colin Mavis, the youthful poet; the labourer who deserts his slatternly wife and family in order to enlist; the 'naturals,' Jenny Gaffaw and her fantastic ill-fated daughter; pious Mizy Mirkland, and many more. And if these figures be not drawn life-size and set direct in the reader's eye, it is for the sake of artistic keeping: the book is deliberately pitched in a lower key than the ordinary novel, and its persons are shown to us, as it were, afar off. But, none the less, every history is life-like, every character consistent within itself—living as with the life of those real people who flourished before our time, and of whom we have all of us heard in fireside stories as children. In this respect the author's aim is perfectly realised, and his work is a perfect work of art.

As is the *Annals* to ministerial and parochial life, so is *The Provost* (published in the following year) to the life of magistrates and municipalities. Yet a greater contrast to

the ingenuous pastor of Dalmailing than that presented by the long-headed Provost of the Royal Burgh of Gudetown it would be almost impossible to conceive. Either of the two, in fact, presents a happy illustration of the respective shares of personality and environment in the formation of character: each is in part God's work, in part the world's. But it is in the magistrate that the world has the larger share. Provost Pawkie, who is Galt's masterpiece in the delineation of character, is worldly wisdom incarnate. Entering public life at a period when jobbery and corruption are rife, he simply takes the world as he finds it, and turns it to the best account he can. Only, as nature has endowed him with a sharper wit than his brother bailies and councillors, he is enabled to tread the paths of policy to much better advantage than they, whilst in the midst of very questionable transactions retaining the appearance of clean hands. A fortunate geniality of temper, which is partly the cause and partly the result of his prosperity, keeps him even at the worst from entirely forfeiting our regard; while, strange as it may seem, the warmth and rightness of his feeling in public or private matters where his own interest is not concerned prove that his heart remains unperverted by the element in which he works. As time goes on, the public life around him becomes purer, and he himself keeps pace with the times. Is this because he has seen the error of his ways, and like all people who are good in the main grows better as he grows older; or is it merely the result of policy trimming his sails to catch the popular breeze? Perhaps the balance of the doubt is in his favour; yet assuredly he is far too clear-sighted to persevere in methods which have become publicly discredited. Galt's artistic instinct

was too true to allow him to make perfectly clear to us all the workings of so subtle a mind; but the worthy cloth-mercer himself stands before us to the life, shrewd, portly, and consequential, with the redeeming twinkle of a dry Scotch humour in his eye and a racy Scotticism on his lip.

As in the *Annals of the Parish*, so in *The Provost* a chronicle of external progress forms the background to the narrator's experiences, and in the latter case this chronicle deals with improvements in the burgh, sanitary enactments, paving and lighting, repairing the Tolbooth steeple, and so forth. These affairs, though in their own way typical also, are of narrower interest than the changes in a countryside, but their inferiority in this respect is more than made up for by such admirable passages of interpolated narrative as, for instance, those which describe the execution of Jean Gaisling for child-murder, the Windy Yule with its disasters on the sea and heart-break on land, the duel, and the visit of the press-gang, or, in humorous vein, the fracas with the strolling players in the change-house, and the incident of the supposed French spy.

Few writers have possessed a greater native gift of story-telling than Galt, and few, it must alas! be added have used their gift more carelessly. In the very slightest of his numberless tales, traces of this gift are apt to appear, and perhaps in none of his writings is it seen to greater advantage than in the incidental reminiscences of *The Provost*. But, in fact, this little book possesses the merit, so rare among our author's writings, of perfection as an artistic whole. In reviewing Galt we are too apt to find ourselves driven to the naïve conclusion of the man in the anecdote, 'that the work would have been

better if the craftsman had taken more pains.' But in this case he either *did* take more trouble than usual, or else, which is more likely, his inspiration was better sustained.

The period now under consideration may be defined as that of Galt's masterpieces; yet even now a slight decline in his workmanship begins to be manifest. In the same year with *The Provost*, he published *The Steamboat*, and *Sir Andrew Wylie*, thus already betraying a tendency to over-write. *The Steamboat* consists mainly of an account of the experiences of one Thomas Duffle, burgess of the Saltmarket, at the Coronation of George the Fourth—which is described in detail—the said experiences being couched in the racy autobiographical style already familiar to readers of *The Provost*, and relieved by a series of short stories supposed to be related by Duffle's fellow-travellers. In many of these stories—and notably in those told by the Sailor Boy and the Soldier's Mother, in *Deucalion of Kentucky* and *The Dumbie's Son*—Galt's powers are seen to advantage. Unfortunately their effect is marred by the singularly ill-conceived and irritating device on the part of the author of 'leaving off at the most interesting point.' In a single instance this trick might have been tolerated, but the reader loses patience when he finds it repeated again and again. This, however, is but a single example out of many which might be cited from Galt's writings of his propensity to ill-timed joking, and his seeming inability to take his own work seriously.

It has been asserted that, of all Galt's novels, *Sir Andrew Wylie* was the most popular south of the Tweed. If this was so, its popularity was due far less to intrinsic desert than to the accident that a great part of the action

of the story takes place in England, whilst the principal actors—among whom is included a portrait of Lord Blessington—instead of belonging to the Scottish lower or middle classes, are members of the English aristocracy. A success based upon such grounds as these has of course no real value, and besides being of tedious length, the novel in question falls in other ways far short of the author's best achievements. Andrew Wylie is intended as the type of the canny young Scot who goes up to London and makes his fortune. We see him first as a queer 'auld-farrant' urchin, and then as an eident thrifty youth. He fully means to get on, he has the sharpest of eyes to see on which side his bread is buttered, and, above all, he has none of the ordinary failings of youth, and sows no wild oats. In fact he is rich in all those serviceable qualities of which perhaps the perfect exemplar in real life is no Scot but the Yankee Benjamin Franklin, and he has a quaint vein of native humour thrown in. And yet, notwithstanding so many qualities and so few infirmities, he is no prig, but, like Franklin, compels not only our respect, but our liking. So far the author has done well. But when he goes on to describe 'Wheelie's' rise in the world, we feel that the means of his advancement are altogether too phenomenal. With such a friend as the Earl to help him, what young man might not have risen? But this is only a single instance of his luck. Throughout his career, the hero meets with the consistent and amazing good-fortune of a prince in a fairy-tale, making conquests at first sight not only of lackadaisical Riversdales and scatter-brain Dashingwells, but of the King and of Pitt himself. And so, as the story progresses, its improbability increases, until in the scenes between Andrew and the

dowager, and Andrew and the baronet, it becomes flatly and absolutely incredible. In this particular—I mean in the entire disproportion between the effect produced by the hero upon the reader and that which he is supposed to exercise on the other characters in the book—the story shares the fundamental defect of another Scottish novel, the work of a much more pains-taking hand—*The Little Minister*.

Galt's next publication of importance was *The Entail*—a novel of which the theme is 'gear,' a Scotsman's pertinacity in gathering it, and his tenacity in holding it when gathered—a matchless subject for the illustration of national character. And in this case the mere desire of acquisition is elevated and to some extent humanised by being associated with another characteristic passion of the Scot—to wit, the pride of family. The story turns upon the disinheriting, for estate reasons, by Claud Walkinshaw, Laird of Grippy, of his eldest son, and on the events which spring therefrom. Walkinshaw, who is the representative of an old but ruined family, has been brought up in penury, but at an early age has set before himself as his aim in life the reconquest of the family estates. Towards this object every step he takes is directed; in its interest every secondary consideration is sacrificed. His youth has been spent in haggling as a pedlar, and when, having by his own exertions established himself in trade, he decides to marry, he goes, of course, 'where money is.' His first-born, Charles, is his favourite son; but even paternal affection must give way before the ruling passion. Watty, the second son (a masterly sketch) has been a 'natural' from his birth. But he is heir to the estate of his maternal grandfather, and it is only through a transaction depend-

ing on the possession of this property that a Walkinshaw can be reinstated in possession of the undiminished Walkinshaw estates. To these circumstances Charles is without hesitation sacrificed, and his father's dream seems at last to be realised. But, though he has gained his point, the old man finds himself further than ever from contentment. The stars in their courses seem to fight against him, the consequences of his unjust act recoil upon him, and he is even driven to believe himself an object of heavenly vengeance. Thus—in his character as a father visited by retributive justice through his children —Claud Walkinshaw may be considered the Père Goriot of Scottish fiction. And so far the book is fine; but unfortunately, from this point—about midway—the level of excellence is not sustained. In the midst of his woes, Claud is carried off by a shock of paralysis; but the evil he has done lives after him, thus supplying material for the remainder of the novel. But the calculating business-man, the youngest of the three brothers, who now succeeds to the rôle of principal character, is colourless in comparison with his father. The writing, too, though relieved by the delightful sallies of the 'Leddy Grippy'—one of the very best of Scotchwomen in fiction—becomes diffuse to such a point that we wax impatient for the expiation of the old man's misdeeds by his disinterested grandson. Both Scott and Byron are said to have read this book three times, but the modern reader will probably rest content with a single perusal.

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, *The Entail* was favourably received, and by this time the author is said to have been so elated by success as to boast that his literary resources were far greater than those of Scott, or any other

contemporary.* Whether in deliberate rivalry or not, certain it is that, by turning his attention to the historical romance, he now entered the field which the Wizard had made particularly his own. In the meantime he had taken up his abode at Esk Grove, near Musselburgh, where, in possible emulation of Abbotsford, he is said to have contemplated building a 'veritable fortress,' exactly in the fashion of the oldest times of rude warfare.

The results of his bold literary enterprise were seen in *Ringan Gilhaize*, *The Spaewife*, and *Rothelan*—the first two published in 1823, the third in the following year. In an article from the pen of Mr Francis Espinasse, in the Dictionary of National Biography, these books are disposed of as 'three forgotten novels'; but the description lacks discrimination. Forgotten, for aught I know to the contrary, they may be; but at least one of the three deserved a happier fate. *Ringan Gilhaize* is, in fact, a very fine historical romance, and one, it may be said in passing, which would well repay resuscitation at the hands of some enterprising publisher. A happy instinct had directed Galt in his selection of a period which is certainly the most important, as it is one of the two most romantically interesting, in Scottish history. For though the War of Independence be the darling theme of Scottish patriotism, what I may call the War of Religious Liberty enjoys the two-fold advantage of a wider sympathy and a deeper intellectual significance. Galt has skilfully conducted us through the entire period of this struggle, for his story, opening during the regency of Marie of Lorraine, concludes with the battle of Killiecrankie, whilst of intermediate historical events which

* R. P. Gillies, *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran*, vol. iii., p. 59.

bear upon the main issue, the greater number receive some notice in passing. Of course the danger of such a proceeding is lest fiction become subordinate to fact, thus making the main interest of the book an historical rather than an imaginative one. But this danger Galt has cleverly avoided. His method is to bring bygone times home to us through the imagination—as, for instance, in the scene of the gathering of devout persons in Gilhaize's house, or the open air preaching near Lasswade—whilst at the same time quickening our interest in historical occurrences—such as the battle of Drumclog, or the march of the Covenanting forces to Edinburgh—by causing his imaginary characters to participate in them. This, I conceive to be the true philosophy of the historical romance. And into the spirit of the particular movement with which he deals, it must be acknowledged that Galt has penetrated further than Scott. For the true aim of the writer of a novel treating of these times in Scotland was obviously to disregard such a non-essential as sporadic insincerity, to penetrate the outer crust of dourness and intolerance, and whilst maintaining the balance of perfect fairness, to compel the reader to sympathise with the best of the Covenanters, not only in their bitter resentment of cruel wrongs, but in their most earnestly cherished and loftiest ideals. And this, which Scott did not care to do, Galt has accomplished, in virtue of which achievement his book is entitled to rank as the epic of the Scottish religious wars.

In attempting to embrace within the compass of a single novel the one hundred and thirty years or so of his period, the author of *Ringan Gilhaize* was certainly assaying a very hazardous experiment. For one thing, of

course it was necessary that he should change his hero more than once, and the risk by so doing of dispersing and losing the reader's interest was immense. But whilst by taking the family instead of the individual as his unit, he has preserved artistic consistency, from this danger he has escaped unscathed. For from the time of the mission of Michael Gilhaize to St Andrews, and his adventures with the wanton Madam Kilspinnie, to that of the death of Claverhouse by the hand of the half-deranged or 'illuminated' Ringan, the interest of the story never flags. It abounds in fascinating passages of adventure—such as the journey of the elder Gilhaize to Eglinton, or the wanderings of Ringan and Mr Witherspoon after the fight at Rullion Green; whilst, having already referred to an advantage possessed by Galt over Scott, I may here add that there are passages in this book evincing a literary style, an intensity, and a delicacy with which Sir Walter could not compete. Such is the passage describing Gilhaize's reflections whilst waiting, in the grey of morning, at the gate of Lord James Stuart's house; the passage which follows, describing the spreading of the news that John Knox has arrived in Edinburgh, and that which describes the dalliance of the Queen of Scots with the Reformer on Loch Leven shore. That Scott was a far greater writer, as he was a far happier man than his contemporary, no reviewer in his senses would venture to deny. But that Galt possessed qualities which Scott did not possess, though less freely acknowledged, is not less true. When the number and extent of his works is considered, it must be owned that the occasions upon which Galt puts forth his full powers, or allows us to praise him without reserve, are sadly few. All the more reason, therefore, that when

he does give us such an opportunity, we should avail ourselves of it with courage and without stint! It now only remains to add that the book is written in clear and terse old Scots, to which a dash of the peculiar phraseology of the Reformed Church adds a touch of quaintness.

'Surely something must have come over Galt!' is one's involuntary exclamation on reading his next book, for a greater falling off from *Ringan Gilhaize* than *The Spaewife* can scarcely be imagined. Here even the writing is slipshod; but, alas! these ups and downs are but too characteristic of the author. Like the former work, in the cabals and factions of the rival claimants—or, more properly, aspirants—to the Crown of Scotland during the reign of James the First, *The Spaewife* has a promising and powerful theme. But of the treatment of this theme it may be said that it can boast scarcely one redeeming feature. The conduct of the tale is involved and obscure, and abounds in incidents and dialogues which, while tedious and perplexing in themselves, serve neither to illustrate character nor to advance action. Indeed, the reader is heavily taxed to remember the motives and the relations with one another of the different persons presented. Nor is the book appreciably stronger in the department of character-drawing. Upon the poet-king, the romantic ill-fated lover of Joanna Beaufort, one would suppose that a novelist might delight to lavish his best art. Instead of this, the King and Queen of the story are mere blanks. Catherine Douglas is no better, and such originality in character-sketching as the book can show—and that is not much—is to be found in the portraits of Glenfruin, the deep though simple-seeming Highland chieftain, and of the timorous and vacillating Earl of Athol.

Rothelan, a tale of the times of Edward the Third—the historical portions of which are drawn from an interesting work on that period written by Joshua Barnes, an antiquary of the seventeenth century—is unfortunately more nearly on the level of *The Spaewife* than on that of *Ringan Gilhaize*. The book is not wanting in spirited scenes, but the welding of history and romance is but imperfectly accomplished, notwithstanding an abuse of breaks and gaps, abrupt transitions and passages irrelevant to the main narrative. Then again, between the machinations of the conscience-haunted Amias and his inscrutable henchman Ralph, and the counter-machinations of the wily Adonijah, the intricacies of the tale are so much too subtle as to end in puzzling the reader himself. In a passage which may perhaps have been intended as a sly hit at Scott, the author expressly disclaims any attempt to reanimate the 'scenes of chivalry, and the pride, pomp, and panoply of war,' or to restore the archaic language, or the 'fashions of the draperies, or the ornaments and architecture in the background.' His concern, he tells us, is not with such subordinate matters as these, but directly with the human heart itself. For a poet or novelist the position is a perfectly tenable one, and it is not to this but to the fact that he lets us see that he does not take his work seriously, that the author's failure is due. For into his lighter scenes an element of burlesque, which had already peeped out in his last book, again obtrudes itself; and burlesque, though a capital thing in its way, is here entirely out of place. Neither could it under any circumstances be supposed by a writer of historical fiction that the illusion which it is his business to produce would be assisted by discussion of such

topics current at the time of writing as Sir Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*, or the question of the three-volume novel.

As under favourable conditions there is perhaps no form of labour more delightful than literary work, so there can be none more sickening when it is half-hearted or against the grain. Galt had now produced two novels in succession in which it was but too apparent that his heart was not, and he may well have felt weary of the work. Or their languor may have been due to the fact that his interest had been drawn off in another direction. At any rate, after a long and—if we judge it by its best productions—an extremely brilliant spell at his desk, he now practically abandoned it for some years to come. Well had it been, not only for his best interests, but for his material happiness, had he remained where he was!

The immediate occasion of this change in his life was as follows:—It happened that some of the principal inhabitants of Canada, whose property had sustained damage in the American War of 1814, had recently become urgent in their claims for compensation from the mother country. As the result of 'proceedings' on which the *Autobiography* throws no light, Galt was commissioned to act as agent in this country for the injured parties, which commission he accepted, undaunted by the worry and demands upon his time which it must necessarily entail, and set zealously to work to get the claims allowed by the Treasury. He gained his point subject to conditions, it being agreed by Government that the demands of the claimants should be satisfied from the proceeds of the sale of certain Crown lands in Canada known as the 'reserves.' To find purchasers for this land now became

Galt's object, and mainly through his instrumentality the 'Canada Company' was formed. But in the meantime, the inhabitants of Upper Canada, among whom party spirit ran unusually high, having prejudiced their case with Government, it was determined that the money realised by selling the reserves should be devoted to other purposes. Thus Galt found himself defeated in his object, and in this juncture he was persuaded to join the Canada Company as a member. He was then appointed a Commissioner to determine the value of the land to be purchased by the Company, and having crossed the Atlantic, he proceeded to York, the capital of Upper Canada, where the Commission prosecuted its enquiries. His health at the time was bad, but his task was congenial. From boyhood he had nourished a hankering after colonisation, and if we abate a few comparatively trifling dissensions, his experiences at this time seem on the whole to have been agreeable. In due course the Commissioners signed their report and returned to England, only to receive the news that their labours had been unexpectedly complicated by action taken by the Canadian clergy in relation to the 'clergy reserves.' After some difficulty this matter also was at length adjusted, and the Company having obtained its Charter, Galt was deputed to return to Canada to superintend the founding of the new colony. Whilst the affairs above-mentioned had been under discussion, he had, however, found time to produce *The Omen* and *The Last of the Lairds*, two small but admirable works in contrasted styles.

Indeed, the sustained excellence of the former suffices to constitute it his masterpiece in the purely tragic vein. It is likewise in all probability his most characteristic

work, its unique and special claim to attention consisting in the tense and lurid imaginative atmosphere which the author has created and made to pervade his tale. Availing himself of the autobiographical convention, and assuming a fantastic dramatic guise, he gives the rein to his fancy and roams at large in a world that is dominated by those presentiments, bodings, and subtle hidden relations of things, which had always exercised so powerful a fascination over his mind. And yet—what is of vital importance in the effect which he obtains—these portents are never allowed to lead us away from the firm earth, or from actual life. From the very first the reader is brought under the potent spell of the author's imagination, and so perfect is the art that ever as the dark tale unfolds the author's grip gains in strength. There are passages of fervid and gloomy eloquence in the writing which recall nothing in literature so much as Chateaubriand's masterpiece, and it is notable that, whilst in other respects the two stories are entirely distinct, the mysterious and repellent point on which they turn is one. *René* was almost pure autobiography, and it is plain to those who have studied Galt's more intimate utterances that into *The Omen* he threw much of what was moody and fantastic in his own mind and personality.

The Last of the Lairds is a pleasant comedy of old Scotch manners, rich in the masterly painting of old Scotch character. The plot turns on the making up by busybodies of a match between a withered spinster and an elderly, partly imbecile, and ruined landlord—the threatened ugliness of the theme being averted by a gaiety rare in Galt's work, and also—as in the case of some of Hogarth's pictures—by sheer skill and power displayed in the char-

acterisation. The contrasted meddlers, the bride and her sister, the Nabob, and the Laird's Jock are all of them capital; whilst the Laird himself, though failing to attain the breadth and dignity proper to a type, is at least a good and by no means ungenial portrait. The change wrought in him by marriage, if surprising, is not incredible, and serves to pave the way for the welcome happy ending. This book, which was left incomplete by Galt when he returned to America, received some finishing touches from his friend Moir, though the hand of the latter cannot be said to be traceable in its pages.

Late in the year 1826, the author returned to Canada, having already, by his own account, some grounds for believing that he was regarded with hostility. Whether these suspicions were purely morbid or not it is impossible to say, but a general consideration of his fitness for the work to which he had chosen to devote his life may not be out of place. There is every reason to believe that he was afterwards harshly and unjustly used; yet judging solely from what he himself has told of himself, one must allow that he was not precisely the sort of man to select for the discharge of important public business. That his ability was extraordinary, and his power of work immense, has been amply established; none the less does it remain true that in certain qualities not less essential to business he was positively defective. Morbidly sensitive, he lacked the wisdom to control his feelings under a sense of injury, and was too much inclined to form conclusions, and to act, upon impulse. In addition to this, imagination or fancy—of which, in a world constituted as ours is, the mere suspicion will often suffice to prejudice a man in his dealings with his fellow-men—was

far too active a power in his brain. But, to leave such considerations as are grounded upon character and revert to substantial facts, what was the assumption from Galt's previous history as a man of business? That history reveals a goodly number of schemes and of attempts, scarce one of which but had proved abortive or a failure. Surely, if he was in truth a competent business man, ill-luck must have pursued him with uncommon pertinacity; and even allowing this to have been the case, he will still stand condemned as a wretched judge of the chances of success inherent in any given business concern. The years at which we have now arrived were the most momentous in his life as a man; but in a sketch of his literary career, such as the present, their place is subordinate.

Haunted by presentiments of evil even at the time of leaving home, Galt had scarcely reached Canada when his troubles began. In fact his differences with Sir Peregrine Maitland, the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, date from the morning after his arrival. Of this disagreement it is sufficient to say that Galt was not the aggressor, though very likely his previous conduct had been less wary than behoved for one in his delicate position. Certainly, with all due sympathy for a much-suffering man of genius, it cannot be asserted that his temperament was one calculated to smooth away difficulties, or, where self-love was concerned, to carry him pleasantly out of a misunderstanding. The Governor, besides suspecting him of unfriendliness to the Government, was jealous of a supposed inclination to interfere in public matters outside his sphere; and though these suspicions were alike groundless, it unfortunately happened that a communication

which Galt had addressed to the editor of an opposition journal afforded a specific ground of complaint. Here, at once, were all the materials for a very pretty quarrel.

A visit to Quebec, however, brought more agreeable experiences, social and adventurous. Thence Galt proceeded to York, to commence the duties of his mission. He was now practically in sole charge of the business of the Company, but he seems to have felt quite equal to his responsibilities, and when winter was over he decided to begin operations by founding a city in the Company's territory. Determined to clothe the occasion with as much impressiveness as possible, and having selected St George's Day as an auspicious date, he accordingly travelled to the appointed site—the last nine miles of the journey lying within the primeval forest. Here is his account of the proceedings :—

'It was consistent with my plan to invest our ceremony with a little mystery, the better to make it be remembered. So intimating that the main body of the men were not to come, we walked to the brow of the neighbouring rising ground, and Mr Prior having shown the site selected for the town, a large maple tree was chosen ; on which, taking an axe from one of the woodmen, I struck the first stroke. To me at least the moment was impressive,—and the silence of the woods, that echoed to the sound, was as the sigh of the solemn genius of the wilderness departing for ever. The doctor followed me, then, if I recollect correctly, Mr Prior, and the woodmen finished the work. The tree fell with a crash of accumulating thunder, as if ancient Nature were alarmed at the entrance of social man into her innocent solitudes with his sorrows, his follies, and his crimes. I do not suppose that the sublimity of the occasion was unfelt by the others, for I noticed that after the tree fell, there was a funereal pause, as when the coffin is lowered into the grave ; it was, however, of short duration, for the doctor pulled a flask of whisky from his bosom, and we drank prosperity to the City of Guelph.'

The name was chosen in compliment to the Royal Family. To matter-of-fact minds the characteristic tone of this passage may appear dangerously poetical, so perhaps it is well to add that the site of the new city had been most judiciously chosen. Occupying a tongue of land projecting into a river, almost in the centre of the district which separates the lakes of Ontario, Simcoe, Huron, and Erie, the infant township enjoyed extraordinary facilities for communication. It became prosperous, and within the space of forty-five years its population had reached the total of 50,000.

Galt now threw himself with great zeal and energy into his work, which was on a grand scale and of a stimulating character, and, besides the founding of cities, included the felling of forests, exploration, and the naming of places unnamed. To a voyage undertaken for the purpose of finding a harbour on Lake Huron, was due the origin of the now flourishing city of Goderich. Of course the romance of this sort of life, together with the sense it gave him of playing an important part in the spread of civilisation, were agreeable and flattering to Galt; but in other respects his position was not without drawbacks. Those symptoms of troubles to come which had so early presented themselves to him had by no means disappeared; whilst, as he assures us, secret enemies were also at work against him. There were not wanting signs of friction between the Government and the Directors of the Company, the stock of the latter fell to a discount, and the Directors thereupon taxed their Commissioner with extravagance in the carrying out of his plans. He began to find himself subjected to petty annoyances, and at this time an incident in which he had humanely, but perhaps

injudiciously, befriended some helpless emigrants served further to embroil matters.

In this juncture, he received a private warning to expect a reprimand from his Directors. No doubt there were faults on both sides, but conscious that he had done his best, and smarting under the injustice of being assumed unheard to be in fault, he placed his resignation in the hands of a friend. The friend, however, decided not to present it, and Galt therefore continued his labours as before, evincing an astonishing fertility in projects and ideas, of which we may suppose a fair proportion to have been applicable enough to his circumstances. Unfortunately causes of annoyance continued to flow in upon him, and it was evident that a climax was not far off.

The spectacle now afforded by the *Autobiography* is a melancholy one. It is that of a gifted and generous-minded, though unduly irritable, man-of-letters entangled in toils of red-tape, and in the meantime exposed to the darts of his enemies. In such a contest—though in some respects Galt was a giant pitted against pigmies—it was a foregone conclusion that he must come off second-best. Matters were precipitated by the Directors appointing an accountant to assist him in his duties. The conduct of this person supplied grounds for a belief that he was authorised to exercise surveillance over the Superintendent, and such a position being intolerable, Galt resolved to return to England. Indeed he found himself driven to the conclusion that it was intended to break up the Company, and that his own removal from office would be a step towards that end. Unfortunately he was destined to undergo treatment even less agreeable than that which he anticipated. Circumstances having

compelled him to defer his return to England, he paid a final visit to Goderich, and had arrived at New York on his homeward journey when he was informed that he had been superseded. As he had been on the point of retiring from the service, his material position remained practically unaffected. But his resignation, if indeed it were irrevocably determined on, had certainly not been publicly announced, and to a man of his temperament it must have been gall and wormwood to have forcibly taken from him even though 'twere but that which he was ready to resign. No wonder that he felt himself to have been treated with the vilest ingratitude. 'The Canada Company,' he writes, 'had originated in my suggestions, it was established by my endeavours, organised in disregard of many obstacles by my perseverance, and, though extensive and complicated in its scheme, a system was formed by me upon which it could be with ease conducted. Yet without the commission of any fault, for I dare every charge of that kind, I was destined to reap from it only troubles and mortifications, and something which I feel as an attempt to disgrace me.'*

The writer of the article, before referred to, in the Dictionary of National Biography has spoken of the *Autobiography* as 'remarkable for self-complacency.' It is, therefore, only fair to state that the value which Galt puts upon his own services as a colonial organiser is not unsupported by testimony from without. The report of a local expert, incorporated in Galt's narrative, testifies not only to the intrinsic excellence of his system, but to the success attending it; whilst an address of gratitude and good wishes presented by the settlers in the new city bears

* *Autobiography*, vol. ii., p. 157.

witness to the personal estimation in which they held him. Indeed one of the main causes of his failure seems to have been that he took too high a view of his own mission, aspiring to aim at the good of humanity, where his associates and principals were content to contemplate gain: a Quixote set to perform the work of a Board composed of Sancho Panzas. Even at this date, had he been informed at once that his dismissal must be regarded as final, he would have been spared some suffering. But his agony—the term is scarcely an exaggeration—was prolonged by suspense and by unavailing struggles. And finally, as if anything were yet wanting to complete the irony of his position, he lived to see the Company which he had himself founded, and in the service of which three of the best years of his life had been spent, develop into a flourishing concern, yielding abundant profits in which he had no share.

Misfortunes come not singly, and the fall of the lion is the opportunity of meaner creatures. The determining of his connection with the Canada Company had hit Galt severely in his pecuniary circumstances. He now found himself unable to meet the claims which were made upon him, and at the suit of a certain Dr Valpy of Reading, one of the oldest of his English acquaintances, to whom he owed the paltry sum of £80 for the education of his sons, he was presently arrested. Conscious as he was of unimpeachable probity of intention, and marking, as in his Utopian way he did, a distinction between law and justice, he felt this last indignity keenly. He, however, made no sign, but endured with imperturbable stoicism a long period of confinement. None the less—partly by the physical restraint to which he was so little accustomed,

partly, as he himself with only too much show of probability suggests, by distress of mind—his constitution was irreparably injured. He was now entirely dependent on his pen, and though his literary activity continued as great as before, the literary fruits which he put forth had lost the fineness of their old savour. Of this he seems to have been aware, for he has put on record the fact that his later novels were written to please the public, not himself, and that he would not wish to be estimated by them. For our purpose, therefore, a hasty glance at them may suffice.

In 1830 he published *Lawrie Todd*, a tale of life in the backwoods, which, with *Bogle Corbet, or The Emigrants*, (1831), was founded upon fact, and designed by the author to serve the double purpose of amusing the general reader and conveying reliable information to those practically interested in the American colonies. *Southennan*, a tale of the days of Mary Queen of Scots, also published in 1830, was inspired by the tradition associated with a romantic old mansion-house, which had impressed Galt's fancy in youth. In the same year he also produced his *Life of Byron*, of which—so keen was public interest in the subject at the time—three editions were exhausted in as many months. The author's view of the noble poet's character has been already indicated; his work has, however, been pronounced 'valueless.' About this time he also acted as editor of *The Courier*, a Tory newspaper; but, finding the work uncongenial, after a few months abandoned it. In 1831, by way of a change of employment, at the suggestion of Lockhart, who was always a good friend to him, he put together his amusing *Lives of the Players*. In the same year he took up his abode at

Brompton—a suburb in those days not yet absolutely devoid of the charms of the country—where for some three or four years to come he occupied Old Barnes Cottage, a somewhat dilapidated building, but one which possessed the invaluable appendage of a large and pleasant garden.

It was at this time that Carlyle met him at a dinner-party at the house of Fraser, the publisher, and wrote a description of him. But before quoting this sketch, we may give that of Moir, penned some eight years earlier. At that time, according to the Doctor's testimony, Galt was 'in the full vigour of health,' a man of herculean frame, over six feet in height and inclining to corpulency, with jet-black hair as yet ungrizzled, nose almost straight, small but piercing eyes, and finely rounded chin. When Carlyle saw him, trouble had already told upon him. 'Galt looks old,' he writes,* 'is deafish, has the air of a sedate Greenock burgher; mouth indicating sly humour and self-satisfaction; the eyes, old and without lashes, gave me a sort of wae interest for him . . . Said little, but that little peaceable, clear and *gutmüthig*. Wish to see him again.' This account he supplemented a month later as follows: 'A broad gawsie Greenock man, old-growing, lovable with pity.'

The need for pity soon increased. It has been stated that Galt's health had suffered from his confinement, it was about this time further affected by the first of a long series of shocks, which are described as of a nature 'analogous to paralysis.' This sufficed to destroy such hopes of active employment as remained to him—and he had been, as usual, hard at work weaving schemes

* 'Journal,' under date January 21st, 1832.

with all his former ingenuity—and in process of time reduced him to a wreck. Still he clung to his pen, adding to the already lengthy list of his works the novel of *Stanley Buxton, or The Schoolfellows*, as well as two political satires entitled *The Member* and *The Radical*. Mrs Thomson, authoress of 'Recollections of Literary Characters,' an old friend, who visited him when he was growing ever more and more disabled, has left a touching account of his helplessness. Galt received her without rising from his seat, gave her his left hand, and pointing to his right, said, 'with a little quickness, "Perhaps you have heard of my attack? It has fallen upon my limbs; my head is clear."' Alas! though clear, his mental powers were by no means what they had been. But, if on some former occasions he had shown himself too much a prey to moral sensibility, where physical suffering was concerned his behaviour was that of a stoic. Whilst the progress of the disease deprived him of the use of one limb after another, he continued, uncomplaining, to make the most of such powers as yet remained. Indeed, during the three or four years immediately following his first seizure, his annual literary output in the departments of editing, book-making, and story-writing, seems if anything larger than usual. But among all these undertakings, it is sufficient here to name the novels of *Eben Erskine, or The Traveller*, and *The Stolen Child*, with the three volumes of tales collected under the title of *Stories of the Study*, and the *Autobiography* and *Literary Life and Miscellanies*. The lax composition of the latter works is probably a symptom of mental decay in the author. The book last named was dedicated by permission to William the Fourth, who in acknowledgment of the compliment

sent Galt £200, which money, together with £50 obtained for him from the Literary Fund, may be said to represent the sum of official, or quasi-official, recognition which he received. For his claims against Government for 'brokerage,' or commission, on the sale of lands to the Canada Company were refused, whilst a pension said to have been promised him by the Company was never paid. The last years of his life were spent in dependence, but it is pleasing to note that the *Autobiography* closes with an expression of satisfaction over the payment of secured debts. He had in the meantime been removed to the house of a sister at Greenock, where he died on the 11th April 1839, not having yet completed his sixtieth year.

In summing up Galt's position, it may be said that he remains the most unequal of all writers possessing equal claims to distinction—the man who *could* produce *The Provost* and *Ringan Gilhaize* and who *did* produce *The Spaewife* and *The Literary Life*. For it is not enough to say, as has been said, that in him there were two men, the man of letters and the man of affairs: there were two literary men in him, the creative artist and the book-maker. And the fact that, of these two, the latter had things too much his own way was due to Galt's defective appreciation of his high calling. 'My literary propensities,' he writes, 'were suspended during my residence in Upper Canada, not from resolution, but because I had more interesting pastime. I did then think myself qualified to do something more useful than "stringing blethers into rhyme," or writing clishmaclavers in a closet.' And again: 'At no time, as I frankly confess, have I been a great admirer of mere literary character; to tell the truth, I have sometimes felt a little shame-

faced in thinking myself so much an author, in consequence of the estimation in which I view the profession of book-making in general. A mere literary man—an author by profession—stands low in my opinion.' The petulance and perversity of the first statement, and the sheer vulgarity of the second, may be palliated by the fact that the author was in low spirits and bad health when he made them. It remains none the less true that these opinions ruled his practice. But they carried their punishment with them. For who will doubt that Galt would have been a happier man had he been truer to his vocation, had he resisted the temptation to fly off at a tangent in pursuit of every commercial will-o'-the-wisp that might chance to catch his eye, and devoted his great powers with something more of steadiness and of seriousness to doing his best at what he was best qualified to do?

He expected that fuller appreciation would come to him after death, and perhaps this expectation, so fallacious in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, was in his case not without plausible grounds. For, from a literary point of view, Galt, like De Stendhal, was in advance of his time. Employing the word in its specialised sense, he was more 'modern' than the greatest among his contemporaries. For example, as has been already indicated, when most himself he had more of what we are pleased to consider the characteristically modern qualities of sensitiveness and imaginative intensity than had Scott. In illustration of this, perhaps we cannot do better than cite the already quoted *Omen*, with its sombre and lurid effects, the sense of bated breath, suspense, impending tragedy, which pervades its every page. Nothing of all

this, as I need hardly say, was in Scott's line; even in the finest and most imaginative of his shorter pieces, in *My Aunt Margaret's Mirror*, the tension is eased by characteristic diffuseness of manner. And Galt's superior —some will call it morbid—sensitiveness extended also to his style: his use of words, when he is at his best, is much more interesting than Scott's. It might possibly even be argued that his Scotch, if perhaps less abundant, is more remarkable for nice appropriateness of word and phrase than Sir Walter's. [And, by the way, the failure of Galt's reputation to cross the Tweed may, perhaps, be partly explained by the fact that, whereas in Scott's novels the dialogue alone is Scotch, in some of Galt's best books the entire narrative is interspersed with dialect words. One can fancy, for instance, the puzzled condition of a southern reader who is informed by the author himself that 'Mrs Malcolm herself was this winter brought to death's door by a terrible host that came on her in the kirk,' or that a certain clock 'was a mortification to the parish from the Lady Breadland.'] But, to continue our argument, besides the above, Galt has more of the modern pictorial quality than Scott: there is more in his descriptive work which is addressed directly to the eye. Once more, he repeatedly gratifies a modern taste by choosing for his theme what is fantastic, or occult, or what lies off the beaten track. In stating all this, we would, of course, guard against being understood to imply that all these characteristics are points of advantage possessed by Galt over Scott. On the contrary, some of them may even be symptoms of an age of literary decadence; what we do maintain is that, in virtue of these characteristics, his chance of appealing to a late nineteenth-century audience

is improved. As a final word under this heading, Galt may be called the forerunner of the Realistic movement in Scottish fiction. *The Provost* and *The Annals* might almost belong to the age of Tourguenieff and Mr Henry James, and in this respect his works have been more studied than they have been praised, their influence has been greater than their reputation. Generally, and in conclusion, Galt may be credited with having done to some extent for Glasgow and the West of Scotland what Scott triumphantly accomplished for the Borders and the Highlands, and for the trading and professional classes of his country what Scott did for its gentry and peasantry.

D. M. MOIR

'DELTA'

'AFTER all, how precarious a thing is literary fame! Things to which I have bent the whole force of my mind, and which are worth remembering—if any things that I have done are at all worth remembering—have attracted but a very doubtful share of applause from critics; whilst things dashed off like *Mansie Wauch*, as mere sportive freaks, and which for years and years I have hesitated to acknowledge, have been out of sight my most popular productions.' Thus wrote Moir, under date of April 12th, 1845—six years before his life's labours closed—to his friend and biographer, Thomas Aird, author of *The Devil's Dream*. And in this instance posterity has taken its cue from contemporary popularity; for it is upon the homely and genial *Mansie Wauch*, and on that alone, that the once considerable literary reputation of 'the amiable Delta' rests to-day.

David Macbeth Moir, born on the 5th January 1798, was the son of Robert Moir and Elizabeth Macbeth, whom Aird describes simply as 'respectable citizens.' His birthplace was Musselburgh, and to Musselburgh he remained faithful through life. Indeed, though lives of men-of-letters—from Shakespeare to Thomas Hardy—afford plenty of instances of local attachment, there can be few instances I should suppose of lives more closely associated

with a single place. In Musselburgh Moir's life was spent; Musselburgh he served faithfully, both in his profession and as a public servant; and in the neighbourhood of Musselburgh he placed the scene of his most popular work. Gratifying is it, therefore, to know that Musselburgh has recognised him as her poet—a minor writer certainly, yet exclusively her own.

Having received his schooling in his native town, at the age of thirteen young Moir was bound apprentice to a physician in practice there. His apprenticeship lasted four years, during the latter part of which, as also during the year following, he studied medicine in the Edinburgh University. In 1816 he obtained his surgeon's diploma. In the following year he lost his father, and being then eighteen, became the partner of a Dr Brown of Musselburgh, whose practice kept him so occupied that for more than ten years to come he is said not to have spent a single night out of the town.

Meantime, having a facile pen (too facile it has proved!) he had begun to compose as far back as 1812, about which year he sent two essays to a Haddington publication entitled *The Cheap Magazine*. In 1816 he contributed to the *Scots Magazine*, and, further, commemorated the exploit of Lord Exmouth by publishing anonymously *The Bombardment of Algiers, and Other Poems*. Despite pressure of work, he did not give up literature on entering the medical profession, but in time became a contributor to Constable's and Blackwood's Magazine—to the latter of which, over the signature 'Δ,' he came regularly to furnish not only *jeux d'esprit* but essays and serious verse as well, his contributions in all amounting to the large total of nearly four hundred. In this manner he became

acquainted with John Wilson, for whose showy poetry he entertained an admiration which was doubtless less uncommon then than it would be now. Other periodicals to which he contributed were *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*. Between medicine and literature, his life now went on busily but uneventfully. In the end of 1824 or the commencement of the next year, he published, under his pseudonym, a volume of verse to which he gave the title of the *Legend of Genevieve*, which he dedicated to the veteran author of the *Man of Feeling*. The titular poem is a sentimental story written in the manner of Byron's Tales, the remaining pieces being on miscellaneous subjects. About the same time the first instalments of *Mansie Wauch* made their appearance in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the completed story, with additions, being published as a book in 1828. Moir was a man of an intensely domestic disposition, and having become affianced in this year, in the following summer he took to himself a wife in the person of Miss Catherine Bell of Leith, whom he espoused in the Church of Carham in Northumberland, celebrating the occasion by a series of Sonnets on the Scenery of the Tweed. By this lady he eventually became the father of eleven children. His literary reputation was now established, and in 1829 Mr Blackwood made him an offer of the editorship of the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, which, however, he declined. In remaining constant to the medical profession, he has been credited with purely philanthropic motives; but, without bating a jot of my respect for the man, the following (his own) explanation of the case seems to me the more reasonable one. 'In early youth,' says he, in a letter to David Vedder, the sailor poet of Orkney, 'I had many aspiring feelings to dedicate

my life to literature, and to literature alone; but I thank God—seeing what I have seen in Galt, in Hogg, in Hood, and other friends—that I had resolution to resolve on a profession, and to make poetry my crutch and not my staff. I have, in consequence, lost the name which, probably, with due exertion, I might have acquired; but I have gained many domestic blessings which more than counterbalance it, and I can yet turn to my pen, in my short intervals of occasional relaxation, with as much zest as in my days of romantic adolescence.' This is the utterance of a sensible man who, having his way to make in the world, decides on the expediency of a certain course and adheres to it. Possibly Moir's estimate of his own powers was a juster one than that of many of his friends; at any-rate it is satisfactory to learn that, 'in spite of the common distrust of the literary character,' he succeeded in making his way as a doctor even in that place where proverbially a prophet is apt to lack honour. Mr Blackwood and others of his friends also urged him to leave Musselburgh and to set up in practice in Edinburgh, offering to use their interest in obtaining patients for him. But these offers he likewise declined. His next publication (1831) consisted of *Outlines of the Ancient History of Medicine*, and was intended as the first instalment of a complete history of the subject, although increased pressure of professional duties, occasioned first by the events of the next year and then by the retirement of his partner in the year following, prevented his further execution of the design.

The period at which we have now arrived is one of those which have been rendered terribly memorable by a visitation of cholera, and in the commencement of 1832 the town of Musselburgh was attacked with special

severity by the epidemic. So great was the terror prevailing throughout the country that many physicians are said to have fled from their posts, but now, as also during a later outbreak, was the time when Moir's character shone out with peculiar lustre. Rising to the height of the emergency, he was to be found night and day at his post, endeavouring both to lessen the sufferings of the sick by his medical skill, and to comfort the dying with the consolations of religion. His humane exertions on behalf of the poor were, in particular, remarkable. This is a period regarding which one would gladly supply further facts, for it is, no doubt, the most interesting in Moir's life, and it is consequently with regret that we find it passed over in a few lines in the accredited biography. When that was written, circumstantial details of his faithful labours might still have been collected, and these would have brought the man nearer to us than anything else could do. But Aird has given us nothing but generalities. During the outbreak, Moir held the post of Secretary to the Board of Health of Musselburgh, and it was as an answer to numberless enquiries addressed to him in this capacity that he now wrote and published a pamphlet, entitled 'Practical Observations on Malignant Cholera,' which, says Aird, flew like wild-fire through the country, and which he shortly supplemented by 'Proofs of the Contagion of Malignant Cholera.'

No doubt by way of recruiting after his labours, he this year attended the Meeting of the British Association, which was held at Oxford, and afterwards visited London, mainly in order to see Galt, with whom he had become friendly some years before, and who was now

living in broken health at Brompton. On this occasion he had an interview with Coleridge at Highgate. The sage, who received him in bed, and treated him to 'two hours of divine monologue,' talked at first of his own early life, incidentally reciting part of his early-written Monody on the Death of Chatterton, and so far all went well. But Moir, who had a constitutional dislike of mysticism, and who ought to have known better, had the rashness to put a few questions to the poet, 'relative to his peculiar speculations in philosophy,' and from that moment, needless to say, he found himself involved in the intricacies of a labyrinth.

As that of a medical man in the full swing of a large practice, Moir's life now affords but little material to the biographer. In a letter to Robert Macnish, his dearly-loved friend and brother in medicine and the muses, he has himself described his daily existence. 'Our business,' says he, 'has ramified itself so much in all directions of the compass—save the north, where we are bounded by the sea—that on an average I have sixteen or eighteen miles' daily riding; nor can this be commenced before three or four hours of pedestrian exercise has been hurried through. I seldom get from horseback till five o'clock; and by half-past six I must be out to the evening rounds, which never terminate till after nine. Add to this the medical casualties occurring between sunset and sunrise, and you will see how much can be reasonably set down to the score of my leisure.' Still, such leisure as he had, he perseveringly devoted to literature. When driving upon his rounds, he would read in his carriage; but his chief time for study was after the house was shut up for the night, when all was quiet around him, and when he

could, with some degree of comfort, sit down in his library to read and write. 'Even then, however, from the uncertainty of his profession, he was never altogether sure of his own time. Often did he remark that, whether it was the contrariety of human nature, or his own peculiar sensitiveness to interruption at such a time, he was most liable to be broken in upon when he was most deeply engaged in writing.' Under such circumstances we cannot wonder that his literary work lacks finish. The wonder is rather that he did not give up literature altogether; but we read that he loved it too well to do this, and that he never seemed so happy as when his mind was employed upon it. As a doctor of literary men, he exercised a beneficial influence. Shortly before the death of Mr Blackwood, that gentleman lay ill in Ainslie Place; whilst Galt, who was also in bad health, was living in lodgings close by. Relations between the two had been strained, and illness prevented their meeting. But it is pleasing to read that their mutual respect and esteem were now renewed, and that Moir, who was in attendance on both, carried kind messages between them.

A most affectionate parent, Moir had sustained a succession of cruel bereavements by losing three of his children, who died in early childhood, within the space of about eighteen months, in the years 1838 and 1839. To relieve his feelings on these occasions, he wrote a series of elegies, which, after being circulated among his friends, were published, with a few other poems, in 1843, under the title of *Domestic Verses*. It is as an elegiac poet—if as a poet at all—that the author is now remembered, and one of these elegies—called by the self-conferred name of one of the babes, 'Casa Wappy'—has enjoyed great

popularity and is still included in anthologies, though in my own opinion a less meritorious composition than the the second of the three poems on the same subject, entitled 'Casa's Dirge':—

'Now winter with its snow departs,
The green leaves clothe the tree;
But summer smiles not on the hearts
That bleed and break for thee:
The young May weaves her flowery crown,
Her boughs in beauty wave;
They only shake their blossoms down
Upon thy silent grave.

His elegiac muse is sweet and fluent, and breathes the consolations of Christianity. But, like Motherwell, he is apt to be over-lachrymose and to insist upon his grief, which is fatal to pathos. His touch, too, is uncertain. For instance, in one Sonnet we have this fine line,

'The bliss that feeds upon the heart destroys,'

in near juxta-position with the ridiculous figure,

'Joy's icicles melt down before Time's sun.'

Here as elsewhere, too, he freely repeats himself. Aird has named *The Deserted Churchyard* as Moir's highest imaginative piece. But Aird is no critic, and description was not Moir's forte. He multiplies touches—each perhaps good in its way—multiplies them, indeed, to excess; but to combine and compose them into a whole is beyond him. And the same defect—the mark either of an inferior talent, or of an untutored one—is noticeable in his critical portraits. Of his poetry generally, then, it it must be confessed that it belongs to that class which, finding acceptance to-day, is without significance for the morrow. But, in justice, it must be remembered that in

its own day it not only pleased the general reader, but also drew warm praises from such judges as Tennyson, Jeffrey, Wordsworth, and Lockhart. Moir's time, as we have seen, was not at his disposal, but besides—or perhaps because of this—he was an impatient composer. He chose—if such things be determined by choice—to write much rather than to write well. As a whole his poetry is inferior in style to that of his less prolific contemporary, Thomas Pringle. And certainly, if poetry is intended to endure, it must be moulded in some less pliant material than that which Moir employed.

Not much now remains to tell. In the year after the publication of his *Domestic Verses*, Moir contracted a serious illness by sitting all night in damp clothes by the bedside of a patient, and in 1846 his general health suffered further from the effects of a carriage accident, which also permanently lamed him. In 1848 he made an excursion, lasting two and a half days, and meditated during seven previous years, to the Lake District with Mrs Moir; and in the following year he visited the Highlands, with Christopher North, who was 'in great force,' Henry Glassford Bell, and one or two others. In spring of 1851, he delivered a course of six lectures at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, his subject being the Poetical Literature of the Past Half Century. On appearing on the platform, he had a very warm reception, and his lectures, proving popular, were soon afterwards published; nor have they quite lost their interest yet. Of course at the present day no one would be likely to turn to them for an estimate of the genius, say, of Byron or of Shelley, or for a summing up of the poetical achievement of Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Keats. It is in the nature of

things that truth in criticism, as in evidence, is arrived at by a slow process, and abler pens have dealt with these great writers since Moir's day. But should anyone wish to know the estimation in which they were held at the date in question, he will generally find a good indication of it here. And in so doing, as was inevitable, he will come across some curiosities of criticism—as, for instance, where the lecturer, speaking of Byron and Wilson together, as the two rising poetic lights of the year 1812, adds that 'it is difficult even yet to say which of the two was most distinguished for general scope of mind, for imaginative and intellectual power.' Also, should any student desire a sketch—descriptive rather than critical—of such half-forgotten literary figures as 'Monk' Lewis and his followers, or of the 'artistic artificial school' of Hayley, the 'Swan of Lichfield,' and the Della Cruscans, or seek for appreciative observations on the author of *The Farmer's Boy*, on Kirke White, or on Samuel Rogers, here he will find them. Besides these lectures and the works already mentioned, Moir's literary undertakings include an edition of the works of Mrs Hemans, an Account of the Antiquities of the Parish of Inveresk, written for the Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), and a few occasional monographs.

On the 22nd of June of this year, in dismounting from his horse at the door of a patient's house, Moir sustained further injuries to his already partially disabled leg. Failing to rally from the effects of this accident, and hoping to derive benefit from rest and change, about a week later he set out upon a short excursion. Mrs Moir accompanied him, and they had reached Ayr, and had visited the cottage where Burns first saw the light, when the Doctor became

seriously ill. Declining medical assistance, however, he struggled on to Dumfries, where he became so much worse as to be forced to take to his bed. It was soon evident that death was at hand. On hearing of his illness, several of his friends had hastened to his side, and surrounded by these and by members of his family, faithfully attended by his wife, and fortified by a firm religious faith, he passed away on the morning of Sunday, the 6th July. The inhabitants of the town in which he had laboured so indefatigably decreed him a public funeral, paying every mark of respect in their power to his memory, and shortly afterwards his statue, executed by a sculptor named Ritchie, who had been a pupil of Thorwaldsen, was erected in a commanding situation on the banks of the river Esk. Besides his professional labours, he had been a Member of the Council of his native town and of its Kirk Session, had attended the General Assembly as a Representative Elder, and had acted as Secretary to a local Reform Committee appointed on the eve of the passing of the great Bill. In fine, his life had been essentially that of the good citizen—an honourable part for which we have so high a respect that we should be glad to see it oftener adorned with literary distinction.

In person Moir was tall, well-formed and erect, of sanguine complexion and with hair tending to the 'sandy' hue, his keen sense of humour, during friendly intercourse, being particularly manifest in his countenance. In private life, he was amiable and exemplary, and much beloved by many friends, including several distinguished writers—'a man,' says the writer of his obituary in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'who, we verily believe, never had an enemy, and never harboured an angry or vindictive thought against a

human being.' Nor did this proceed from any lack of determination or force of character, of which he had plenty.

Did not one recognise the relation subsisting between humour and pathos, it would be a surprise to find the melancholy Moir—the mourner of a score of dirges—figuring as author of a succession of broadly and farcically comic episodes; for such, in the main, is the *Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor in Dalkeith.* The book was conceived in avowed imitation of Galt; and, in general outline, the autobiographical tailor, with his unconscious self-revelation, is obviously suggested by the Provosts and Micah Balwhidders of that writer. For in literature Galt is as much the originator of the 'pawky' Scotsman of the commercial or professional class as was the creator of Dinmont and Headrigg of the Scotsman living on the soil and racy of it. But if Delta borrowed the first idea of the story from his friend, the means by which he develops it owe little or nothing to that source. There, indeed, the sprightly little volume reminds us of a very different class of literature. In their frank appeal to those who are easily amused (happily a numerous body), and in the pleasant clownishness of their fooling, a large proportion of the scenes recall forcibly the ancient folk-tales, 'drolls' and chap-books, or the more modern collections of local stories founded upon the same, and the peculiar style of humour associated with such time-honoured popular favourites as Lothian Tom and George Buchanan, the King's Jester. Incidents, for instance, like that of James Batter, the weaver, concealed in the closet during the visit of the Minister, and of his inopportune fall through the bottomless chair and imprisonment there, or of the big

suit of clothes being sent home to the little man, and the little suit to the big man, belong to the primeval stock-in-trade of the rustic humourist; whilst as for the episode of Deacon Paunch and the cat—probably there are few parishes in the country boasting the possession of a phenomenally heavy man where some 'variant' of this story is not current at the present day. The epigram—if I may so call it—of the book is also conceived after the popular model; as, for instance, when the aggrieved collier-woman, taunting Cursecowl on the prominence of one of his features, declares that he has 'run fast when the noses were dealing'; when it is observed, in reference to the various grades of society and their interdependence, that 'we all hang at one another's tails like a rope of ingans'; or when the writer speaks of an 'evendown pour of rain, washing the very cats off the house-tops,' or remarks of hopes not quite likely to be fulfilled that 'many a rottener ship has come to land.' Some of these phrases may perhaps be proverbial, but at any rate into just such verbal moulds flows, or used to flow, the expression of the livelier fancy of the people. The Scotch, too, in which the book is written is singularly rich and racy.

It may possibly be asked whether stories such as those referred to above have much to gain from literary elaboration, brevity in this peculiar form of wit appearing perhaps even more than usually desirable. The answer is that the result has justified the experiment. For one thing, *Mansie Wauch*—which preceded the *Pickwick Papers* by some years—is one of the earliest classic specimens of broad humour which is entirely free from coarseness; and, secondly, in this instance, most of the farcical epi-

sodes—such as the mock duel, the Volunteering scene, the scenes in the watch-house or with the dumb spae-wife, and the playhouse scene, where Mansie so artlessly mistakes feigning for reality—are made in a way to serve the purpose of illustrating character. In the case last named—even allowing for the tailor's native simplicity, for the fact that this is his first play, and for the 'three jugs' of which he has partaken in the company of Glen, the farmer—a pretty strong call is made on humorous convention, or on the credulity of the reader. But, after all, in this style of writing, who would 'consider curiously'? No! give the humourist his head is the rule, concede him a trifle of exaggeration, and let him make you laugh if he can. This book was never meant for closets and the midnight oil, but to be read aloud over the fire on winter's eves in the family circle.

Of course strokes of humorous portraiture somewhat subtler than the above are by no means wanting, as is shown for instance, in the same scene, in the fuddled tailor's preoccupation with the clothes worn by the actors —the good coat 'with double gilt buttons and fashionable lapells,' or 'the very well-made pair of buckskins, a thought the worse of the wear, to be sure, but which if they had been cleaned, would have looked almost as good as new.' But throughout the book little Mansie is equally 'particular,' especially in regard to clothes,—he has the loquacity of one occupied in a sedentary manual toil, and the abounding detail in description of minute occurrences which characterises dwellers in small towns. The scene of the stampede from the barn, following his reply to the players, is quite in the best manner of the humourists and caricaturists of that day,—

when uncouth persons tumbling one over the other in their haste, coat-tails torn off, bull-dogs fastening teeth in human calves, and wigs flying to the winds, seem to have constituted a never-failing resource for 'bringing down the house.' Pity that, like Mercutio, we are become grave men since then! However by far the best scene of this sort—a classic of its kind—is that which paints the inroad of the gigantic butcher, infuriated at the misfit of his new killing-coat, into the tailor's shop, and the subsequent tussle between him on the one hand and Tommy Bodkin, the three 'prentices, Mansie, and James Batter on the other. Everywhere George Cruikshank, the illustrator of the book, is neck and neck with the author, hitting off the very spirit of his fun, and indeed sometimes adding a point to it; but in his delineations of this scene and of that with the spaewife he surpasses himself.

Of course the book would not be Moir's if it entirely lacked poetic and pathetic relief, which is supplied in the contents of the papers found in the Welshman's coat-pocket; in the episode of Mungo Glen, the apprentice from the Lammermoors, who dies of home-sickness and of a country boy's hatred of the town, and in the story of the *Maid of Damascus*.

Of the character of Mansie—the keystone, so to speak, of the book—it cannot be said that it stands out with the firmness and clearness of Galt's best work in the kind, still less of one of Miss Ferrier's inimitable creations. Yet, if somewhat faintly limned, the little tailor — so eager, so busy, and so thrifty, such a queer mixture of guilelessness, shrewdness, and superstition, 'a douce elder of Maister Wiggie's kirk,' and abounding in Scriptural

allusion accordingly, cautious, yet apt to be 'overtaken' as well as overreached, but with his heart exactly in the right place—is a figure who in the long run wins and holds a place in our sympathy. In the course of his professional avocations, Moir may have had occasion to observe that tailors generally are a nervous race of men, and from the commencement of the narrative we are shown that Mansie is full of groundless fears and anxieties—terrified to discharge his musket when on parade as a Volunteer, and frightened out of his wits in the Kirk Session house by night. And yet in the hour of need, when house and home are in danger on the night of the fire, we see him brave as a lion and brimful of resource—saving 'the precious life of a woman of eighty that had been four long years bed-ridden,' and by well-directed efforts with his bucket accomplishing more than the local fire-engine had done. Such a contrast as this—at once effective and true to human nature—or as that where Mansie, finding the escaped French prisoner concealed in his coal-hole, is divided between wrath against the enemy of his country and sympathy for a fellow-creature in distress, put the finishing touches to a genial figure, which in our Scottish national literature has a little niche of its own.

MISS FERRIER

Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, the great mistress of the novel of manners in Scotland, was born in Edinburgh on the 7th September 1782, and was the youngest of her parents' ten children. Her father, James Ferrier, was a younger son of John Ferrier, laird of Kirklands, in Renfrewshire, and her mother—whose maiden name was Helen Coutts—was the daughter of a farmer near Montrose. James Ferrier was by profession a Writer to the Signet, having been admitted a member of the Society in the year 1770. He had been trained to his vocation in the office of a distant relative, who had the management of the Argyll estates, and to this gentleman's business he ultimately succeeded. He was thus on terms of intimacy with the Duke of Argyll, through whose instrumentality he was appointed a Principal Clerk of Session. In this office he had Sir Walter Scott as a colleague, and he was also so fortunate as to enjoy the friendship of Henry Mackenzie, author of the admirable *Man of Feeling*, of Dr Blair, and last, not least, of Burns. Thus, from her earliest years onward, his young daughter must have been accustomed to see and to hear of the literary lights of the Scotland of that day.

After their marriage, Mr and Mrs Ferrier occupied a flat in Lady Stair's Close in the Old Town. Their large family was made up of six sons and four daughters. When Susan was fifteen she lost her mother, and soon

afterwards she was taken by her father to visit at Inverary Castle, the seat of his patron the Duke. Here a new world was opened to the plainly brought up Edinburgh girl. Here for the first time she saw fashion and the 'high life,' and here—either on this or some subsequent occasion—she formed several acquaintances which were destined to influence her career. Under John, fifth Duke of Argyll, society at the Castle had at that period a somewhat literary and artistic tone. Among its visitors was the accomplished Lady Charlotte Campbell—afterwards Lady Charlotte Bury—a name which, if unknown to the present generation, was once of some repute in the world of letters. Lady Charlotte was the Duke's younger daughter, and had inherited much of the beauty of her mother, the celebrated Elizabeth Gunning. She was just seven years older than Susan Ferrier, was distinguished by a passion for the *belles-lettres*, and was accustomed to do the honours of Scotland to the literary celebrities of the time. During the year of Miss Ferrier's first visit to the Castle, she published anonymously a first literary venture, which bore the conventional title of 'Poems upon Several Occasions,' by 'A Lady.'

It may readily be guessed that this fascinating and high-born personage—distinguished as she was by the honours and the romance of authorship—produced her due impression on the imagination of the young visitor. Susan's literary instincts must certainly have been quickened by the intimacy—for a friendship which lasted till death sprung up between herself and Lady Charlotte. But, if she was a gainer in one direction from the acquaintance, I am inclined to believe that she was a loser in another. Years after, when she herself

became an authoress, her earliest work was disfigured by direct and unsparing portraiture of living persons among her acquaintance. Now no doubt this kind of writing may be productive of extreme mirth to persons qualified to read between the lines, and it must be acknowledged that Miss Ferrier's talent has made the mirth outlast its immediate occasion. Still, judged as art, this kind of thing is neither great nor gracious, and to her credit be it said that the authoress of *Marriage* lived to see that this was so, and to amend her style accordingly. It may be noted, however, that the works attributed to her friend Lady Charlotte include conspicuous instances of a similar error in taste. Amid the vicissitudes of many years, her ladyship lived to produce a number of works of fiction, of the contents of which such titles as *Flirtation*, *The Journal of the Heart*, *A Marriage in High Life*, may afford some indication. But the single work with which in the present day her name is associated—and if she never acknowledged the authorship, it must be remembered that she resisted all provocations to deny it—is the notorious Diary in which a lady-in-waiting of Caroline of Brunswick has chronicled the follies and indiscretions of that unhappy princess, and the unpleasantnesses of daily life in her Court. Bearing this in mind, one can scarcely regard the brilliant Lady Charlotte as the best of friends for a young woman, her inferior in years and station, though greatly her superior in talent.

Among other visitors met by Susan at Inverary, two may be particularised as having afterwards contributed by their oddities to enliven the pages of her first book. These were the eccentric Mrs Seymour Damer, the amateur sculptor and friend of Horace Walpole, and

Lady Ferrers, widow of the peer who was hanged for the murder of his steward. With a Miss Clavering, a grand-daughter of the Duke, who was a child of eight at the time of her first visit to the Castle, she struck up an eager friendship. An animated correspondence was started between them, some of the letters in which have been preserved. These are for the most part undated, but have reference to a work of fiction which the young ladies proposed to undertake in partnership, and it is thus that the germ of *Marriage* is first brought to light.

'I do not recollect,' says Miss Ferrier, writing in high spirits; 'I do not recollect ever to have seen the sudden transition of a high-bred English beauty, who thinks she can sacrifice all for love, to an uncomfortable solitary highland dwelling among tall red-haired sisters and grim-faced aunts. Don't you think this would make a good opening of the piece? Suppose each of us try our hands on it.' And, later on, after submitting a portion of her work, she writes again:—'I am boiling to hear from you, but I've taken a remorse of conscience about Lady Maclaughlan and her friends: if I was ever to be detected, or even suspected, I would have nothing for it but to drown myself. I mean, therefore, to let her alone till I hear from you, as I think we might compound some other kind of character for her that might do as well and not be so dangerous. As to the misses, if ever it was to be published they must be altered or I must fly my native land.'

In this passage, even after allowing for girlish facetiousness of expression, Susan Ferrier appears in the character of an accomplished 'quiz,' sailing dangerously close to the

wind. Of course her correspondent is delighted with the specimen of work submitted to her, and will not hear of anything being altered. What school-girl would? She essays to allay her friend's fear of discovery, and offers to take the responsibility of the personalities upon herself. In a subsequent letter, dated December 1810, she describes reading the manuscript to Lady Charlotte during a drive. Her ladyship laughed as she had never been seen to laugh before, and pronounced the fragment 'without the least exception the cleverest thing that ever was written'—a verdict which after more detailed examination she endorsed in writing, declaring it to be '*capital*, with a dash under it.' Not otherwise do the thoughtless and light-hearted egg each other on to mischief.

But Miss Ferrier was by this time eight-and-twenty years of age. Her native strong good sense asserted itself, and for a long time she resolutely declined to publish her work. (I ought ere this to have explained that the intended collaboration with Miss Clavering had fallen through, the sole passage contributed by the younger lady being the brief and not particularly interesting *History of Mrs Douglas*). In course of time, however, the merits of the book became known to persons having more authority to judge them than Lady Charlotte Bury or her niece. Mr Blackwood, the publisher, read the manuscript, and strongly urged the authoress to prepare it for publication; whilst no less a personage than Sir Walter Scott, in the conclusion to his *Tales of My Landlord*—then seemingly in proof—referred flatteringly to a 'very lively work entitled *Marriage*,' and singled out its author for mention among writers of fiction capable of

gathering in the rich harvest afforded by Scottish character. At length, in 1818 — after undergoing several changes in the interval—the book was given to the world. It was published anonymously, and the authoress, speaking at a later date, professes to have believed that her name 'never would be guessed at, or the work heard of beyond a very limited sphere.' But from such obscurity the gallery of portraits which it contained must alone have sufficed to save it. For, in addition to the two ladies already mentioned—whose oddities appear to have contributed jointly to the inimitable figure of Lady Maclaughlan—the three spinster aunts were drawn from certain Misses Edmonstone, whilst Mrs Fox represented Mary, Lady Clerk, a well-known Edinburgh character of the time. It must not, however, be supposed that the vogue of the book depended upon adventitious circumstances alone; for *Marriage* soon became popular far beyond the limits of any local set. In London it was attributed to the pen of Sir Walter Scott, and it is even stated to have been very successful in a French translation.

Its success at home can surprise no one, for never before had the idiosyncrasies of Scottish society been so vigorously pourtrayed. As has already been seen, the means adopted for showing them off are ingeniously contrived. At the commencement of the story we are introduced to the beautiful but shallow and artificial Juliana, the Earl of Courtland's only daughter—a young lady who has been trained solely with a view to social success and the formation of a brilliant alliance, the more solid parts of education having in her case been systematically neglected. She is betrothed to the elderly Duke of

L——, but at the last moment throws him over and elopes to Scotland. The companion of her flight is Douglas, a handsome young officer in the army, the child of Scotch parents, but brought up in England by a wealthy adoptive father. The honeymoon is scarce over when the young people find themselves, not only partially disabused of their illusions, but in actual pecuniary straits. Juliana's elopement has hopelessly alienated the Earl; whilst Douglas, absent from his regiment without leave, is superseded in the *Gazette*. In these circumstances the only course open to them is to take up their quarters with the bridegroom's father, at his castle of Glenfern in the Highlands. Their proposal to do so is most cordially received, and now the irony of circumstance begins to declare itself. Lady Juliana has repeatedly protested that with the man of her choice she could be happy in a desert. But then her idea of a desert, as she avows when 'tis too late, is a beautiful place full of roses and myrtles, which, though very retired, would not be absolutely out of the world; where one could occasionally see one's friends and give *déjeuners* and *fêtes champêtres*. A very different kind of place is Glenfern Castle. After a long journey in a drizzling rain through dreary scenery, their destination is reached, and Juliana makes her *entrée*, attended by her footman and lady's-maid, surrounded by her lap-dogs, squirrel, and mackaw, and encumbered by all the paraphernalia of an artificial elegance. Never was there a meeting between more opposed extremes.

'At the entrance of the strangers, a flock of females rushed forward to meet them. Douglas good-humouredly submitted to be hugged by three long-chinned spinsters whom he recognised as his aunts, and warmly saluted five awkward purple girls he guessed to be his sisters:

while Lady Juliana stood the image of despair, and, scarcely conscious, admitted in silence the civilities of her new relations.'

The three elderly spinsters are the Laird's sisters—Miss Jacky, who is esteemed the most sensible woman as well as the greatest orator in the parish, Miss Grizzy the platitudinous, and Miss Nicky, who is not wanting in sense either; and these representatives of a bygone social order are the most celebrated characters in the book.

Appalled by the sight of the surroundings amid which her life is to be spent, and distressed by the insolence of a pampered lady's-maid who instantly throws up her place, Juliana presently succumbs to hysterics.

'Douglas now attempted to account for the behaviour of his noble spouse by ascribing it to the fatigue she had lately undergone, joined to distress of mind at her father's unrelenting severity towards her.

'"O the amiable creature!" interrupted the unsuspecting spinsters, almost stifling her with their caresses as they spoke. "Welcome, a thousand times welcome, to Glenfern Castle!" said Miss Jacky. "Nothing shall be wanting, dearest Lady Juliana, to compensate for a parent's rigour, and make you happy and comfortable. Consider this as your future home. My sisters and myself will be as mothers to you: and see these charming young creatures," dragging forward two tall frightened girls, with sandy hair and great purple arms; "thank Providence for having blest you with such sisters!"

'"Don't speak too much, Jacky, to our dear niece at present," said Miss Grizzy; "I think one of Lady Maclaughlan's composing draughts would be the best thing for her—there can be no doubt about that."

'"Composing draughts at this time of day!" cried Miss Nicky; "I should think a little good broth a much wiser thing. There are some excellent family broth making below, and I'll desire Tibby to bring a few."

'"Will you take a little soup, love?" asked Douglas. His lady assented; and Miss Nicky vanished, but quickly re-entered, followed by Tibby, carrying a huge bowl of coarse Scotch broth, swimming with leeks, greens, and grease. Lady Juliana attempted to taste it, but her delicate palate revolted at the homely fare; and she gave up

the attempt, in spite of Miss Nicky's earnest entreaties to take a few more of these excellent family broth.

'"I should think," said Henry, as he vainly attempted to stir it round, "that a little wine would be more to the purpose than this stuff."

'The aunts looked at each other; and, withdrawing to a corner, a whispering consultation took place, in which "Lady Maclaughlan's opinion, birch, balm, currant, heating, cooling, running risks," &c. &c. transpired. At length the question was carried; and some tolerable sherry, and a piece of very substantial *short-bread*, were produced.

'It was now voted by Miss Jacky, and carried *nem. con.*, that her ladyship ought to take a little repose till the hour of dinner.'

So bad begins, but worse remains behind; for these are but the occurrences of a few hours, whilst the visit is to be of long duration. However enough has been said to indicate the lines along which the story now develops. The feather-pate Juliana is not of those to whom Time brings wisdom, and a further acquaintance with her surroundings only serves to bring to light fresh disgusts. The gaunt apparitions of the first evening grow no less tiresome as she knows them better, no less hopelessly remote from every habit, tradition or association of her life. But her poison is the reader's meat. In the course of the next few pages we are introduced to Miss Grizzy's friend, Lady Maclaughlan, a distinguished amateur of medicine and an object of awed admiration to the sisters. As this lady steps upon the scene—fearfully and wonderfully attired, and bearing in her hand her gold-headed cane—with her deep-toned voice, her mercilessly blunt remarks, and her uncompromising 'humph!'—her ineffectually recalcitrant little husband borne behind her much as if he were a parcel—she is certainly one of the most memorable figures in all fiction. And among the most laughable scenes in all

fiction must certainly be counted those in which in high dudgeon she cuts short her visit to Glenfern Castle, and—still better, and indeed unsurpassable—in which the ill-starred spinsters, mistaking the day, arrive to visit her when they are not expected.

Nor must it for a moment be supposed that such creations as this and the Aunts are mere masterpieces of the caricaturist. In Miss Ferrier's best characters it may almost be said to be a rule that caricature enters only into the details, and is never allowed to interfere with the main outline. An accusation far more justly to be brought against the authoress of this book is that of hard-heartedness, or a defect of sympathy and even of toleration for her own creations. Susan Ferrier was an uncompromisingly candid woman, as her interesting account of the visits paid by her to Sir Walter Scott are enough to show. That her heart was a kind one we know; but when she took pen in hand it was not her way to extenuate anything. Neither was she given to view persons or occurrences through any softening light of imagination or feeling. 'What a cruel thing is a farce to those engaged in it!' wrote another Scottish author. But she, having devised a farcically cruel situation, squares her shoulders and regards its development with a ruthlessness more proper perhaps to science than to art. Not a touch of compunction has she for her heroine—who, intolerably selfish and heartless as she is, is yet but a child and the victim of the harshest circumstance; not a touch of pity for the pathos and repression of such lives as those of the Aunts. In a word, tolerance is not her strong point. And, admirable as it is, her art yet suffers by the limitation of her sympathies. For one pines for the hundred little humanising touches by virtue of

which the same characters—living though they be—might have lived with a fuller and more gracious life. It is stated that Miss Ferrier's favourite author was La Bruyère, and in such studies as those of Lady Placid and Mrs Wiseacre he is obviously the model followed. And, though her best creations surpass those of her master as a living character will always surpass an abstract type, yet in this, her earliest effort, she still retains a good deal too much of the frigid intellectual method of the Frenchman.

What will, perhaps, more generally be considered a legitimate ground for the unpleasant task of fault-finding is, however, the extremely inartistic construction of the book. As we approach the middle, we are surprised to find the interest shifted to an almost entirely new set of characters, who belong to a new generation. Thus at a time when Lady Juliana cannot be much more than eighteen years of age, she ceases to be prominent in the story, and after the briefest interval we are called on to follow the fortunes of her twin daughters, who are now nearing that age. The bridegroom, Douglas, and two of the Aunts disappear altogether from the book; and this is the more to be regretted because there are few readers but will infinitely prefer the racy humours of the elder generation to the insipid long-drawn-out love-affairs of the contrasted sisters, even when these are more or less successfully enlivened by the sallies of the shrewd Lady Emily, by the caricature figure of Dr Redgill the *gourmand*, and by the absurdities of the literary *précieuses* of Bath.

The success of *Marriage*, justified by its painting of Scottish manners and by the figures of Lady Maclaughlan and the spinster aunts, had the right effect upon the sterling Scottish character of the authoress. It led her to

try how much better still she could do. Six years elapsed before the appearance of her next book, which was published in 1824—like its predecessor, anonymously. Indeed secrecy as to her literary undertakings appears to have been one of the novelist's strongest desires; and, writing much of *The Inheritance* at Morningside House, near Edinburgh —where her father spent the summers—she complains of the smallness of the house as making concealment very difficult.

In the endeavour to improve upon her first achievement, Miss Ferrier was triumphantly successful. 'The new book,' wrote one of Mr Blackwood's correspondents at the time of its publication, 'is a hundred miles above *Marriage*.' Nor does this assertion overshoot the mark; for if the one is at most a bit of brilliant promise, the other is a superb performance. Foremost among its advantages must be counted, in place of the slip-slop of *Marriage*, an interesting and admirably-compacted plot, and a vigorous literary style—the latter marked indeed, yet not marred, by a mannerism of literary quotation. What was shapeless and redundant in *Marriage* is here moulded and restrained by exigencies of the story, with the result that characters well-defined, and skilfully contrasted and relieved, confront the reader standing boldly and firmly on their feet.

Several features of *The Inheritance* seem to have been suggested by the celebrated Douglas Cause. The Honourable Thomas St Clair, youngest son of the Earl of Rossville, has forfeited the countenance of his family by marrying out of his own rank in life. He settles with his wife in France, and here in the course of years a succession of deaths places him in the position of heir-presumptive to the earldom. He announces at head-quarters

the important tidings that Mrs St Clair is expecting to be confined, and having done so, with the Earl's concurrence he and his wife prepare to return to Scotland. But the confinement takes place, prematurely, on the journey. A female child is born, after which event the projected return is indefinitely postponed. So much by way of proem. The opening of the story shows us Mrs St Clair, now a widow, and her daughter, Gertrude, a beautiful and blooming maiden, taking up their abode with the elderly and unmarried Lord Rossville, who recognises the young lady as heiress to his title and estates. Under his roof, attention is drawn to a likeness existing between Gertrude and the portrait of one Lizzie Lundie, a low-born beauty of a bygone day, who had sat as model for a painting in the Castle. This resemblance is noticed by more than one person, and on more than one occasion, and reference to it is generally accompanied by marks of agitation in Mrs St Clair. Meantime the youthful heiress has won the admiration of two young men, cousins of her own, who frequent the Castle—the handsome and elegant Colonel Delmour, a man of fashion and of the world, and the less showy but far deeper-natured Edward Lyndsay. A singular meeting now takes place between Mrs St Clair and a stranger named Lewiston, and soon afterwards it becomes apparent that the latter exercises a great, though unexplained, power over the lady. The stranger's identity is presently revealed as that of the husband—long supposed to be dead—of a nurse of Gertrude's, to whom she had been tenderly attached. At a nocturnal meeting with Lewiston, at which Mrs St Clair has by entreaty, and by throwing out vague threats, compelled her daughter to be present, Lyndsay arrives upon the scene in time to save

Gertrude from molestation, and thus earns her gratitude. However Delmour now declares his passion, which Gertrude returns—with the result that an understanding is come to between them. But the Earl has other intentions regarding the disposal of the hand of his heir, which for family and political reasons he designs to confer upon the Colonel's elder brother, a colourless man-of-affairs. By asserting her independence in this matter, Gertrude provokes Lord Rossville's displeasure; but the unforeseen effect of his lordship's purblind and blundering intervention is merely to bring to light the fact that Lyndsay also is in love with his beautiful cousin. The Earl, who has power to dispose of his possessions as he pleases, is meditating to disinherit Gertrude on account of her disobedience, when his sudden death leaves her free to follow her own wishes. In the meantime, Delmour's conduct has supplied ground for doubting the purity of his motives; whilst Lyndsay, who has again come to her rescue in a trying interview with Lewiston, has shown himself throughout a staunch friend to her best interests. But Gertrude is now Countess of Rossville in her own right; her lover returns to her side, and she is herself too noble-minded to question his disinterestedness. Under his influence she launches out into a variety of extravagant schemes, and going to London, where she becomes the admired of all admirers, devotes herself wholly to the pleasures of society, which for a time have rather an injurious effect upon her character. Lyndsay makes an appeal to her better self, but amid the excitement of her surroundings his remonstrance passes unheeded. Jaded by the excesses of fashionable life, at the end of the season she returns to Rossville,

where the intrusive Lewiston, who has been thought drowned, now again appears upon the scene, and provoked by her disdainful treatment divulges the secret that she is the daughter, not of Mrs St Clair, but of her nurse, and that consequently she has no title to her present position. Overwhelmed by this intelligence, which Mrs St Clair's confession confirms, Gertrude loses no time in informing her lover of the true state of matters, and in so doing reveals the miserable shallowness of his nature. Delmour's love for the beautiful and high-spirited girl is genuine; but nameless and without fortune as she now is, he hesitates to fulfil his engagement towards her. Her love for him has been of such a different nature that she is well-nigh broken-hearted by the discovery. But the faithful Lyndsay stands her friend in need, and the book closes with her reinstatement, long afterwards, as his wife, in the brilliant position which she has already wrongly, though innocently, occupied.

The plot of *The Inheritance*, of which the above is a sketch, is a model of its kind, whilst from first to last the conduct of the narrative is perfect. Indeed the *form* of the story could not be improved—a rare merit even in a masterpiece of British fiction; and though the book is a long one, it contains not a superfluous page. Among the numerous authors quoted in the course of it are Shakespeare and the Greek dramatists, and perhaps, without stretching probability too far, we may assume that the authoress had studied the latter as well as the former. In any case *The Inheritance* in its own degree unites principal characteristics of the Greek and the Shakespearian drama, for the web of circumstance inexorably woven about the innocent and unconscious heroine is

entirely in the manner of the first, whilst the indifferent, life-like alternation of tragic and ludicrous incident in the narrative is of a piece with Shakespeare's irony. No finer example of the latter could be cited than the impressive scene in which Lord Rossville, looking blankly from his window one snowy afternoon, is amazed to see a hearse approaching the Castle. Out of the vehicle, when it has reached the door, steps his lordship's pet aversion and the reader's delight—the undaunted and ubiquitous Miss Pratt. The voluble lady has a long story to tell of the circumstances which have compelled her to resort to this unconventional mode of conveyance, whilst the pompous Earl is scandalised at the general impropriety of the proceedings, and especially at thought of the hearse of Mr McVitae, the Radical distiller, putting up for the night at the Castle. However there is no help for it; nor as it turns out is the visit so ill-timed as had seemed, for the next morning Lord Rossville is discovered dead upon his bed.

But if the book is remarkable for its admirable story, certainly not less remarkable is it for the extraordinary wealth of character which it portrays. Probably few 'novels of plot' are so rich in character, few 'novels of character' so strong in plot. It may be that some carping critic of the ungentle sex will be found to object to Lyndsay and to Delmour, the contrasted lovers of the heroine, as to 'a woman's men'—to urge that their demeanour is too consistently emotional, too demonstrative, to be founded upon any very solid base of character or of disposition. But supposing (which I am far from granting) that there were some truth in this, here at any rate all ground even for hypercriticism must end. And

where in fiction is there a heroine more charming and more lovable than Gertrude St Clair—gentle yet high-spirited as she is, natural, and the soul of truth? Her pretended mother—ambitious and worldly-minded, violent, embittered by the slights and mortifications of her youth and bent vindictively upon retaliation—rises to the dignity of tragedy. Then we have the inimitable rattle and busy-body, Miss Pratt, at home everywhere except in her own house, and incessantly referring to the sayings and doings of an invisible 'Anthony Whyte'—a very masterpiece of humorous delineation; and old Adam Ramsay, the cross-grained, misanthropic, Indian uncle, who yet compels our sympathy by his sentimental attachment to the home of his boyhood, and his constancy to the memory of his ill-starred love. Miss Bell Black, afterwards Mrs Major Waddell, is delightful in her perfect inanity and fatuity; and though her creator may not yet have learned to suffer fools gladly, she certainly has by this time mastered the art of portraying 'as though she loved' them. The Earl of Rossville, puffed up by a sense of his own importance, long-winded, sesquepedalian and null; Miss Lilly, the poetess, her Cockney lover and her brothers; gentle Anne Black; Miss Becky Duguid, the accommodating poor relation; Mrs Fairbairn, the materfamilias; and the peasant-woman whose misguided foresight leads her to prepare betimes her ailing husband's dead-clothes,—all of them are admirable, and all bear evidence of being freshly observed from the life. But the writer has learnt the lesson of substituting poetic for local truth; and if any portraits appear in this gallery—and it is stated that Adam Ramsay to some extent represents the authoress's father—they are such as can no longer rightly give offence to anyone.

Miss Ferrier had reached middle life when she wrote *The Inheritance*, and perhaps the laughter which it provokes is less boisterous than that aroused by the first essays of her youth. But for a scene of high comedy—to select one from many—the first conversation of Miss Pratt and Uncle Adam would certainly be difficult to surpass. Finally, we have abundant evidence that in all that she wrote our authoress was actuated by a genuine desire for the moral and religious welfare of her reader; but in comparison to that of *Marriage*, her *tone* in this book is as is the influence of a well-guided life to a sententious homily delivered from a pulpit. In one word, there is no single point in her art in which she has not risen from what is crude and tentative to what is finished and masterly.

As it well deserved to be, *The Inheritance* was a great success, and amongst those from whom it elicited warm commendation the names of Jeffrey and Sir Walter Scott may be particularised. Some of the chief comic actors of the day wished to have it produced upon the stage, with which object the manager of Covent Garden Theatre applied to Mrs Gore, the novelist, for a dramatic version of the story. But that lady's intentions were anticipated by one Fitzball, a purveyor of transpontine wares in the kind, to whose unfitness for his task the complete failure of the play, when it came to be produced, may probably be ascribed. For in its strong, well-developed plot, and diversified characterisation, the story possesses in a high degree the chief requisites of a successful stage-play. *The Inheritance* has also the distinction of having furnished to Tennyson the outline of his beautiful ballad of *Lady Clare*.

Miss Ferrier was a very careful craftswoman—a fact to which much of her success has been attributed—and it was not until 1831 that her next book, *Destiny*, appeared. Much of it was written at Stirling Castle, while she was on a visit to the wife of the Governor of the garrison. The new novel was dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, to whom the authoress had good reason to feel obliged, for it was largely in consequence of his skilful bargaining that she had received for it the large sum of £1700 from Cadell. The prices paid to her by Blackwood for her two previous books had been £150 and £1000 respectively.

As *The Inheritance* represents the meridian of the writer's powers, so *Destiny* represents their decline—not because there are not some as good things, or very nearly as good things, in the latter as in the former, but because the whole is very much less good. The construction of *Destiny* is loose and inartificial, and almost from the outset the want of a strong frame-work which shall hold the contents together and keep them in place makes itself felt. Properly speaking, there are two stories in the story, —namely, that which centres in the disposal of the Inch Orran property and the adventures of Ronald Malcolm, and that which concerns itself with the development of the relations between Edith and her recalcitrant lover. In itself of course this would be no defect, but instead of being interwoven, or subordinated one to the other, the two stories are allowed to run parallel and distinct until near the end of the book. Thus their interest is dissipated — an effect which diffuseness of treatment materially increases. Idle pages and straggling incidents abound, and in fact the sense of form which was so con-

spicuous in *The Inheritance* is in *Destiny* conspicuous only by absence.

If we judge it as an essay in character-painting, rather than as a story, no doubt the novel comes off better. Again, as in *The Inheritance*, we have a gallery of masterly portraits—though this time the collection is smaller, and the paintings less highly-finished; and again we feel that these portraits are drawn, not from some conventional limbo of the novelist's, but from observation of life itself, backed up by true imagination. Among the group, the Reverend Duncan M'Dow bears off the palm from all competitors. This insufferable person, imperturbable in his own conceit—with his horse-laugh over his own jocularity, his grossness of manners, his greed for 'augmentation,' and his wounded self-love mingling with overweening vanity at the end of the book—is a piece of life itself, and the description of his luncheon-party is as good as anything accomplished by the authoress. The incarnation of fashionable selfishness and frivolity in the person of Lady Elizabeth Malcolm runs him close; but she is probably a less entirely original creation than the Minister—not that she is in any sense a copy, but that the same sort of model has been oftener studied. If we seek for something pleasanter to contemplate, the simple warm-hearted Molly Macauley, the dreamer of dreams, and the devoted adherent of the Chief who snubs her, is an endearing figure. The Chief himself, who loves good eating, and does not disdain to truckle to his rich childless kinsman, is a conspicuous example of materialisation and degeneracy, though the dotage of his 'debilitated mind and despotic temper' becomes almost as tiresome to the reader as it became to Edith and Sir

Reginald. The key to the character of Benbowie, Glenroy's echo, is not quite apparent, and we should have liked to be assured (as we believe) that it was mere ineptitude, and not meanness, which caused him to disappear so hastily on an important occasion when money was required, and to return bringing it with him when it could no longer be of use. The vignettes of Inch Orran, the 'particular man,' and his wife, also stand out in the memory, as does that of the odious Madame Latour. And from this it will be seen that, with one or two exceptions, the more disagreeable personages of the book remain the most in evidence, for the Conways and the family of Captain Malcolm fade into insignificance beside those whose names are enumerated above. And, though the crux is an old one, where the high purpose of the writer is so much insisted on, perhaps it may not be unfair to enquire how far exactly she can be held to succeed in her aims, when even the regenerate reader is ill at ease in the company of her good characters and enjoys himself among her awful examples. The artificiality of some of its dialogues and the triteness of some of its reflections are further symptoms of the enervation which has begun to invade the book.

Miss Ferrier's history is the history of her books, and to these remarks upon her final literary production little need be added. Her mother being dead, and her three sisters married, it fell to her lot to keep house for her father, to whom she was devotedly attached, and with him she continued to reside until his death in January 1829. Her life, which was divided between Morningside House and Edinburgh, and varied by occasional visits to her sisters, is described as a very quiet one, and if we

may accept the Adam Ramsay of *The Inheritance* as at all a close portrait of Mr Ferrier, it must have had its grim side too. She had long suffered from her eyes, and in 1830 she paid her final visit to London, in order to consult an oculist. From his treatment, however, she seems to have derived little benefit; her eyesight failed, and it became necessary for her to spend much of her time in a darkened room; and though she still continued occasionally to receive a few friends at tea in the evening, her life from henceforth was a very retired one. She died in Edinburgh, on the 5th November 1854, at the house of her brother, Mr Walter Ferrier, and was interred in St Cuthbert's Churchyard.

Her dislike of publicity characterized her to the last. It was not until 1851, when a new edition of her works was published, that she consented to allow her name to appear upon the title-page, whilst her unwillingness to be made the subject of a biography led her to destroy all letters which might have been used for such a purpose, and in particular a correspondence with one of her sisters, which contained much biographical matter. The records of her life are consequently few, but the following testimony of an intimate friend is interesting:—

'The wonderful vivacity she maintained in the midst of darkness and pain for so many years, the humour, wit, and honesty of her character, as well as the Christian submission with which she bore her great privation and general discomfort, when not suffering acute pain, made everyone who knew her desirous to alleviate the tediousness of her days; and I used to read a great deal to her at one time, and I never left her darkened chamber without feeling that I had gained something better than the book we might be reading, from her quick perception of its faults and its beauties, and her unmerciful remarks on all that was mean or unworthy in conduct or expression.'

Still more interesting is the sentence in Scott's diary which describes her as 'A gifted personage, having, besides her great talents, conversation the least *exigeante* of any author-female, at least, whom I have ever seen among the long list I have encountered; simple, full of humour, and exceedingly ready at repartee, and all this without the least affectation of the blue-stocking.' Of her considerate kindness to the author of *Waverley*, then in failing health, on the occasion of her last visit to Abbotsford, Lockhart gives this pleasing description :—

'To assist in amusing him in the hours which he spent out of his study, and especially that he might make these hours more frequent, his daughter had invited his friend the authoress of *Marriage* to come out to Abbotsford; and her coming was serviceable. For she knew and loved him well, and she had seen enough of affliction akin to his to be well skilled in dealing with it. She could not be an hour in his company without observing what filled his children with more sorrow than all the rest of the case. He would begin a story as gaily as ever, and go on, in spite of the hesitation in his speech, to tell it with highly picturesque effect; but before he reached the point, it would seem as if some internal spring had given way. He paused and gazed around him with the blank anxiety of look that a blind man has when he has dropped his staff. Unthinking friends sometimes gave him the catch-word abruptly. I noticed the delicacy of Miss Ferrier on such occasions. Her sight was bad, and she took care not to use her glasses when he was speaking, and she affected also to be troubled with deafness, and would say, "Well, I am getting as dull as a post, I have not heard a word since you said so and so," being sure to mention a circumstance behind that at which he had really halted. He then took up the thread with his habitual smile of courtesy, as if forgetting his case entirely in the consideration of the lady's infirmity.'

In conclusion, if Miss Ferrier's work lacks the sweetness and delicacy of Miss Austin's, it has at its best a strength to which her English sister's makes no pretension. The portraits of the former are *bitten in* with a powerful acid unknown in the chemistry of the latter.

But if she was sometimes *downright* to the verge of cruelty, Miss Ferrier's view of life was a sound one. She strikes unsparingly at the rawness and self-sufficiency which are characteristic defects of such large numbers of our countrymen; yet she remains without rival as a painter of Scottish society, and one at least of her novels deserves to rank with the masterpieces of British fiction.

MICHAEL SCOTT

THERE used to be a tradition at Cambridge to the effect that an undergraduate, being called on in examination to give some account of John the Baptist, returned the answer, 'Little or nothing is known of this extraordinary man,'—a reply which probably did not go far enough to satisfy the examiner. Scarcely more satisfying, however, must be the response of the biographer who is called on to gratify natural curiosity regarding the author of *Tom Cringle's Log*—scarcely more satisfying, though with apparently so much less of excuse. For it is only a little over sixty years since the death of Michael Scott. Neither was his a case of posthumous reputation, or of rehabilitation after long neglect, which might have accounted for the obscuring of biographical detail—his work, though it has lost nothing of popularity, or certainly of readableness in the interim, having been received with acclamation on its first appearance. And yet, after diligent and eager enquiry, the present writer finds himself forced to acknowledge that all but a meagre outline of the facts of Scott's life is lost. This is the more remarkable in that he was obviously no bookworm or literary recluse, and that all who know his writings will feel instinctively that one so characterised by humour and the love of good company—to say nothing of practical joking—should have strewn

anecdote thick behind him wherever he went. But if this was so, his traces have been most effectually expunged. The sort of find which now rewards, or mocks, his would-be biographer is, for example, such a tradition as that which records that he was fond of whisky punch—a solitary survival in the mind of one who remembers him in Glasgow, but a trait which, considering the times and the society in which Scott lived, can scarcely be held as individual. This, however, is not the worst. The writer has reason to believe that the glorious sea masterpiece with which Scott's name is chiefly associated was written, or at least partly written, in a house now belonging to himself—namely, the secluded cottage of Birseslees, situated on the banks of Ale, in Roxburghshire. Such, at least, is the tradition which he received from his father, one constitutionally averse to random statement, who had himself occupied the cottage within ten years of Scott's decease, and who, as an enthusiastic yachtsman, familiar with the West Indies, had special reasons for being interested in his writings. Such testimony—as Mr Mowbray Morris, Scott's biographer, remarks—is at least as good as that on which rest most of the statements regarding his life, and no apology is made for adducing it here. Yet, in despite of this testimony, a careful search, recently conducted among the oldest inhabitants of the neighbourhood, has failed to bring to light any but the vaguest and most uncertain references to the author of the *Log*. Under these conditions, what is left for a biographer to do? He has no choice but to content himself with a recapitulation of the few facts already current. One person, indeed, there is in whose power it almost certainly lies, by enlightening our ignorance, to

gratify our by no means unkindly curiosity; but it is generally understood that, for reasons which we have no right to challenge, and which at least in no wise concern the fair fame of the author, that person's lips are sealed. It therefore now only remains to consider whether the darkness which surrounds Scott's life is the result of intention or of accident, and in support of the former conclusion it may be stated that, among men-of-letters of the time, taking their cue from the author of *Waverley*, and the practice of Maga, there existed an undoubted taste for mystification; whilst that the younger Scott shared in it is proved by the facts that his true name was never known to his publisher otherwise than by hearsay, and that in his own family circle and that of his immediate acquaintances the identity of Tom Cringle was unknown. One suggestion is that these measures were taken from a prudential point of view, in the interest of his business as a merchant, which might possibly have suffered had it been known to receive but divided attention. But as he avoided publicity in authorship, he may also have chosen to do so in other things. Otherwise, if internal evidence counts for anything, we should certainly suppose him to have been the least self-conscious of men, and one of the last in the world to trouble his head—unless he did it as a joke—as to what might be known, or not known, about himself.

Under existing circumstances, to write the life of Scott is to reproduce the narrative of Mr Mowbray Morris. Born at Cowlairs, near Glasgow, on the 30th October 1789, he was his father's fifth and youngest son. To that father, Allan Scott by name, the estate of Cowlairs had come from an elder brother, Robert, described as a

Glasgow merchant of good family, who had purchased it in 1778,—at which time the house stood in the country, though its site has long since been swallowed up by the encroachments of the town. Young Scott was sent first to the Grammar School, as the High School of Glasgow was then called, and afterwards to the University, where he matriculated when just twelve years of age. Aird states that he was at school with John Wilson. At the University he remained four years, during the latter part of which he had as his inseparable companion the future author of *Cyril Thornton*, a fellow-student of tastes akin to his own, who has furnished in that novel a picture of the college life of the time. At the University Scott does not appear to have gained distinction. Perhaps, like many another author in embryo, he preferred miscellaneous reading to the college course; at any rate, the few literary allusions scattered over the pages of his books are generally apt and appreciative. However his taste seems to have been for active life, spiced if possible by adventure, and accordingly, in 1806, we find him leaving Scotland for the West Indies.

At this point Mr Morris, our authority, makes a digression in order to describe the magnitude and antiquity of the Clyde shipping-trade, and the effect exercised upon it by the revolt of our American colonies, which, by diverting it from Virginia to the West Indies, had changed its staple from tobacco to sugar. It happened that a family friend of the Scotts, Bogle by name—a Glasgow merchant and the descendant of Glasgow merchants—had at that time a nephew resident in Jamaica, where he was occupied as an estate-agent, and on his own account as a trader. To the care of this gentleman young Scott is now sup-

posed to have been consigned, that he might be taught an estate-agent's duties. The agent's name was George William Hamilton, and one feels sure that no admirer of the *Log* will hear with indifference that in him Scott found the original of the most individual of his many droll planter portraits — the portrait of Aaron Bang.

After profiting for three or four years by the instructions of Hamilton, who combined with his humorous propensities a very decided talent for business, in the year 1810 Scott entered a mercantile house at Kingston, in the employment of which he continued for seven years more. 'These years,' says Mr Morris, 'were the making of the *Log*. His business, coupled with Hamilton's friendship, not only brought him into contact with every phase of society in Jamaica, but sent him on frequent voyages among the islands and to the Spanish Main; and certainly few travellers can have carried a more curious pair of eyes with them than Michael Scott, or entered more heartily into the spirit of the passing hour.' In 1817 he returned to Scotland, and in the year following married Margaret, daughter of the Mr Bogle previously referred to, and consequently first cousin to Hamilton. He was soon back in Jamaica, however, and it was presumably at this time that he occupied the house—situated high up among the Blue Mountains, in midst of some of the finest scenery in the world—which is still shown to visitors as his. He remained in Jamaica till 1822, when he finally returned to his native land to start business on his own account. This he seems to have combined with a share in other mercantile concerns, being at the time of his death a partner in a commission-house in Glasgow, as well as in

a Scottish commercial house in Maracaybo, on the Spanish Main.

It was in 1829 that he first appeared as an author, in which year—again to quote Mr Morris—'the *Log* began to make its appearance in Blackwood's Magazine as a disconnected series of sketches, published intermittently as the author supplied them, or as the editor found it convenient to print them. The first five, for instance, appeared in September and November, 1829, and in June, July and October, 1830, under the titles of "A Scene off Bermuda," "The Cruise of H.M.S. *Torch*," "Heat and Thirst—a Scene in Jamaica," "Davy Jones and the Yankee Privateer," and the "Quenching of the *Torch*"; and these five papers now constitute the third chapter.' But shrewd Mr Blackwood, who greatly admired the sketches, persuaded the author to give them some sort of connecting link, 'which, without binding him to the strict rules of narrative composition, would add a strain of personal and continuous interest in the movement of the story. The young midshipman accordingly began to cut a more conspicuous figure; and in July, 1832, the title of "Tom Cringle's Log" was prefixed to what is now the eighth, but was then called the eleventh chapter. Henceforward the *Log* proceeded regularly each month, with but one intermission, to its conclusion in August, 1833'; and a few months later, after some final touches, it made its appearance as a book. Its success was immediate. It was hailed with applause in particular by Coleridge, Christopher North, and Albany Fonblanque — the first-named of whom pronounced it 'most excellent.' Lockhart in the *Quarterly Review*, in an article on 'Monk' Lewis's

West Indian travels, also speaks of it as the most brilliant series of magazine papers of the time; whilst the *Scottish Literary Gazette* for November 1833 concludes a glowing notice by adjuring the writer, whatever he may undertake next, to remember that he is the author of *Tom Cringle's Log*.

Its successor, *The Cruise of the Midge*, made a more regular progress, from its commencement in March 1834, to its conclusion in June of the following year, though it also required some final overhauling before its appearance as a volume. These two books constitute the literary output of their author, and the completion of the *Cruise of the Midge* brings us within a short distance of his death, which occurred at his house in Glasgow * on the 7th November 1835, when he had just completed his forty-sixth year. A large family survived to mourn his loss. He is buried in the Necropolis, where an unpretending monument marks his resting-place and that of his wife and several of their children. In the inscription which it bears, no allusion whatever is made to his literary achievements. I have been told that in private life Scott was a quiet easy-going man, of modest and retiring disposition, and also, on the authority of an old lady who remembers his death, that great was the surprise in Glasgow when it became known that he had been the author of thrilling tales of adventure by sea and land. It is said, by the way, that certain of Cringle's adventures were drawn from the experiences of a Captain Hobson, father of the Arctic explorer of that name, who when a lieutenant, about the year 1821, was engaged in putting down piracy in the West Indies. The char-

* No. 198 Atholl Place. Article in *Glasgow Herald*, 1st May 1895.

acter of Paul Gelid can likewise be traced to an original.

Here ends what is to be known about Scott's life, and if it is with regret that we accept this fact as inevitable, there is at least a certain consolation to be derived from reflecting that, in this prying age, at least one gallant literary figure stands secure from the mishandling of meddlers. But—the author himself having evaded the biographer — it is scarcely less remarkable that the popularity of his works seems to have won them no adequate eulogy. For, so far as I know, we may search in vain among critical essays for an appreciation of these masterpieces. Possibly their character as books of adventure relegated to the boys' shelf may be in part accountable for this; whilst doubtless the frequent roughness and homeliness of their style—whether casual, or introduced for the purpose of fitting the speech to the speaker—may have scared off many such pedants and wiseacres as have yet to learn that mere *correctness* is one of the very humblest of literary qualities, or at least that genius—so it *be* genius—is like King Sigismund, above the grammar-books. At an age when most boys are still puzzling over syntax and orthography, Mr Thomas Cringle and Lieutenant Benjamin Brail had already brought stout hearts and ready hands to bear upon the work of men, and it is quite true that in the records of their experiences not only do we find foreigners talking their own languages very imperfectly, but also the authors themselves from time to time making use of faulty constructions and of novel spelling. Now had their business been mainly an affair of words and phrases, this had been serious indeed; but as, instead, it happens to be one of

thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the art of communicating them, the case is very different. And we may add that had any man composed ten times as loosely as Cringle sometimes chose to do, whilst still retaining Cringle's power to make us see and feel with him, that man had still remained a most remarkable writer. However already more than enough has been said on the subject of these few and very trifling errors, which in fact interfere not at all with a style which is usually clear, nervous and straightforward.

As has been already indicated, Scott's principal literary gift lay in his power of presentation—his power, that is, of putting simply, sufficingly, and without redundancy, a scene or person before the reader, so that he shall see the one and hear the other speak. From the days of Homer to those of the world-wide success of the youngest of our distinguished novelists, this gift has been recognised as quintessential in the story-teller. In the two broad classes of temperaments, it is wont to assume two separate forms, which differ from one another—in class-room terms—as the objective from the subjective. Of the latter of these—by virtue of which a reader is compelled so completely to identify himself with scenes depicted that he not only seems to witness them, but actually for the time being to participate and play the leading part in them—the works of Currer Bell, and perhaps especially *Villette*, the most highly-finished of her novels, afford notable examples. The converse side of the gift is displayed by the virile and active temperament of Michael Scott; and, of this particular quality, many a writer of far higher reputation has possessed greatly less than he. In illustration of this, the example of his greater namesake may be quoted, for with

all his many other excellences, Sir Walter's pictorial or mimetic effects are seldom, or never, perfectly 'clean'—direct, and free from surplusage or alloy. Michael Scott's, on the other hand, are about as direct as it is possible to be. Illustrations might be quoted at will, for if there is one thing more surprising than the gift itself, it is the lavish use made of it by its possessor on page after page of his writings. The following characteristic scene may serve as an example, and it must be borne in mind that all Scott's fine scenes are incidental: he never, so to speak, makes a point of them.

'It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon, a fine clear breezy day, fresh and pleasant, sometimes cloudy overhead, but always breaking away again, with a bit of a sneezer, and a small shower. As the sun rose there were indications of squalls in the north-eastern quarter, and about noon one of them was whitening to windward. So "hands by the top-gallant clew-lines" was the word, and we were all standing by to shorten sail, when the Commodore came to the wind as sharp and suddenly as if he had anchored; but on a second look, I saw his sheets were let fly. The wind, ever since noon, had been blowing in heavy squalls, with appalling lulls between them. One of these gusts had been so violent as to bury in the sea the lee-guns in the waist, although the brig had nothing set but her close-reefed main-top-sail, and reefed foresail. It was now spending its fury, and she was beginning to roll heavily, when, with a suddenness almost incredible to one unacquainted with these latitudes, the veil of mist that had hung to windward the whole day was rent and drawn aside, and the red and level rays of the setting sun flashed at once, through a long arch of glowing clouds, on the black hull and tall spars of his Britannic Majesty's sloop, *Torch*. And, true enough, we were not the only spectators of this gloomy splendour; for, right in the wake of the moonlike sun, now half sunk in the sea, at the distance of a mile or more, lay a long warlike-looking craft, apparently a frigate or heavy corvette, rolling heavily and silently in the trough of the sea, with her masts, yards, and the scanty sail she had set, in strong relief against the glorious horizon.'

Or this—

'The anchorage was one unbroken mirror, except where its glass-like surface was shivered into sparkling ripples by the gambols of a skipjack, or the flashing stoop of his enemy the pelican; and the reflection of the vessel was so clear and steady, that at the distance of a cable's length you could not distinguish the water-line, nor tell where the substance ended and shadow began, until the casual dashing of a bucket overboard for a few moments broke up the phantom ship; but the wavering fragments soon reunited, and she again floated double, like the swan of the poet. The heat was so intense, that the iron stancheons of the awning could not be grasped with the hand, and where the decks were not screened by it, the pitch boiled out from the seams. The swell rolled in from the offing in long shining undulations, like a sea of quicksilver, whilst every now and then a flying-fish would spark out from the unruffled bosom of the heaving water, and shoot away like a silver arrow, until it dropped with a flash into the sea again. There was not a cloud in the heavens, but a quivering blue haze hung over the land, through which the white sugar-works and overseers' houses on the distant estates appeared to twinkle like objects seen through a thin smoke, whilst each of the tall stems of the cocoa-nut trees on the beach, when looked at steadfastly, seemed to be turning round with a small spiral motion, like so many endless screws. There was a dreamy indistinctness about the outlines of the hills, even in the immediate vicinity, which increased as they receded, until the Blue Mountains in the horizon melted into sky. The crew were listlessly spinning oakum, and mending sails, under the shade of the awning; the only exceptions to the general languor were John Crow, the black, and Jacko the monkey. The former (who was an *improvisatore* of a rough stamp) sat out on the bowsprit, through choice, beyond the shade of the canvas, without hat or shirt, like a bronze bust, busy with his task, whatever that might be, singing at the top of his pipe, and between whiles confabulating with his hairy ally, as if he had been a messmate. The monkey was hanging by the tail from the dolphin-striker, admiring what John Crow called "his own dam ogly face in the water."

'Tail like yours would be good ting for a sailor, Jacko; it would leave his two hands free aloft—more use, more hornament, too, I'm sure, den de piece of greasy junk dat hangs from de captain's taffril.—Now I shall sing to you, how dat Corromantee rascal, my fader, was sell me on de Gold Coast—

'"Two red nightcap, one long knife,
All him get for Quacko,
For gun next day him sell him wife—
You tink dat good song, Jacko?"

'"Chocko, chocko," chattered the monkey, as if in answer.

'"Ah, you tink so—sensible hominal!—What is dat! shark?—Jacko, come up, sir: don't you see dat big shovel-nosed fis looking at you? Pull your hand out of the water—Garamighty!"

'The negro threw himself on the gammoning of the bowsprit to take hold of the poor ape, who, mistaking his kind intention, and ignorant of his danger, shrunk from him, lost his hold, and fell into the sea. The shark instantly sank to have a run, then dashed at his prey, raising his snout over him, and shooting his head and shoulders three or four feet out of the water, with poor Jacko shrieking in his jaws, whilst his small bones crackled and crunched under the monster's triple row of teeth.'

To this talent for presentation, by a most fortunate coincidence, Scott's experience enabled him to add a command of rich and rare material: his subject-matter was quite worthy of the powers which he brought to bear upon it. Indeed, few literary men have been more favoured by time and place. For, letting alone the fact that the West Indies were in those days virgin soil to the romance-writer, letting alone the glorious opportunities afforded by a familiarity with Nature in the tropics, studied in storm and calm, by land and sea—and especially to a man of Scott's taste for strong effects, one gifted with his eye for atmosphere, whose genius itself has something of tropical grandeur and luxuriance, were these opportunities valuable,—letting alone, also, the rich and varied social order amid which he moved—its quaint and original types of planter and seaman, the picturesqueness of its desperadoes, and the naïveté of its coloured people—Scott's sojourn in the islands was timed at a particularly stirring epoch in their history.

Warfare, smuggling and piracy, slavery and the suppression of the slave-trade were being carried on before his eyes; and it is even suggested that such scenes as the boarding of the *Wave*, the examination of Job Rumble-tithump, and the trial and execution of the pirates, may very probably have had their foundation in things actually witnessed by the writer. Now I suppose that I am not singular, and that like myself many genuine lovers of romance delight to cherish the belief that what they are reading, if not actually true, is at least in some way related to the author's experience. In this respect Scott satisfies us perfectly. And herein lies his immense advantage over other competitors in the same field. For in reading, for instance (admirable as they are), the pirate scenes of the *Master of Ballantrae*, we cannot but miss this sense,—so that whilst we hear with bated breath of bloody deeds and hairbreadth 'scapes, we are haunted all the while by an uneasy feeling that this is all but a most brilliantly executed *fantasia*, or variation, upon documents.

Granting, then, that rarely if ever have more brilliant pictures of more interesting incidents been more lavishly set before a reader than in the pages of *Tom Cringle's Log*, we are impelled to enquire what are the corresponding weaknesses which have debarred the author from taking the highest rank as a writer. The answer is not far to seek; it is a defect of constructive power. If he possessed much genius, Michael Scott had but little art. The effect of his fine pictures is not cumulative; each is alike revealed, as it were, by a powerful flash, and the result is that they obliterate one another. For it is surely needless to point out that every work of high artistic achievement is a whole, and that in that whole, and in

relation to that whole, each part has a value greatly exceeding its value when considered separately. But in Scott's stories this is not so. Remove any one incident from one of his stories, and the reader will be the poorer by the loss of an interesting incident, and by no more. And so, with injury only of the same kind, his books might be extended or curtailed, whilst their incidents might be transposed without injury at all. I am aware that to write in this somewhat heavily academic style of a writer than whom no man of equal gifts made ever less pretention, may be to incur the imputation of taking too high a ground, and to draw down criticism upon the critic's head. I can only reply that the extreme excellence, within their own limits, of Scott's literary achievements has provoked me to it, and that had his works shown less surprising merit they should have been treated in a lighter vein.

The same neglect of constructive power which strikes us in the conduct of the tales is apparent in the treatment of the characters. It is the practice of masters of characterisation to make their characters, so to speak, *turn round* before the reader, so that, ere the end of the book is reached, no aspect of them shall have been left unseen. But with Scott one aspect is exhibited repeatedly, and thus our knowledge is circumscribed. That the characters live we feel assured, but with one or two such exceptions as Aaron and Obed, it is as members of a class that we recognise them, not as *individuals*, whilst again and again as we read we are compelled to turn back would we distinguish from his fellows any particular one among the quaintly-named officers and seamen.

In female portraiture Scott attempts but little, in which

he is probably well-advised. For though Cringle's sweetheart is certainly a pleasing sketch enough, in his more ambitious and quasi-Byronic flights—the delineation of the pirate's leman or the bride of Adderfang—the author for the moment leaves nature behind him, and consequently gives us almost the only passages in his books which do not ring true. These passages may perhaps be held to justify the condemnation of Captain Marryat, who pronounced him melodramatic. But—despite the strong nature of the fare which he provides—melodramatic, except in such passages, he certainly is not. For to describe thrilling situations, with the eye not fixed upon the situations themselves but intent on their *effect*, is melodrama in the true sense; and of this the genial author of *The Pirate and Three Cutters* himself supplies some choice examples.

It strikes a reader as strange that the occasion of Cringle's visit to Carthagena evokes no allusion to Smollett, for it is with Smollett and Marryat that we most naturally think of comparing Cringle's creator. Michael Scott does not rise to the Cervantic heights of humour of the former; but few, indeed, are the writers who have done this. Nor, of course, has he Smollett's style; though, on the other side of the account, with thankfulness we acknowledge that his page is quite free from Smollett's filth and coarseness. Marryat also possessed more of the gifts of the novelist than Scott, or at least had greater opportunities of showing them. But there is one point, and that a most telling one, in which Scott has immeasurably the advantage of the others—he comes far *nearer to the reader* than either of them. Of course his easy and homely style, his use of the first person, his occa-

sional confidential digressions, are means employed towards this end, but equally of course the secret of his success lies in his personality. Personality, or, in other words, genius it is which gives him his power over the reader—a power which makes even the refractory and fastidious to follow him, as a dog follows its master. Constitutionally a reader may have small relish for farce, and a positive distaste for horse-play; and yet when Scott is in the mood for either, the reader will become so too. And in a higher and sweeter kind of humour, his power is equally in proportion to the demand of the occasion—in support of which I can cite no better evidence than the delightful scenes in which the sailors of the *Midge* seek to resuscitate the apparently drowned baby boy, afterwards nicknamed Dicky Phantom; and in which their joy is expressed when he gives signs of life; with Dogvane's mission to the officer in command to plead on behalf of his mess-mates for the custody of the child (which shall replace in their affections a parrot blown away in a gale, a monkey washed overboard, and a cat which has died of cold) and the subsequent scenes in which, with a comical shamefaced roundaboutness, one after another, to the admiral himself, puts in his claim for the care of the babe. Scenes more winningly human than these would, I think, be far to seek. In equal degree does this beloved writer hold the key to our manlier enthusiasms. Far distant be the day when amongst generous-minded boys such books as his shall lose their popularity, for it is by these that the best lessons of our history are enforced. It has been said of the playwright Shakespeare that his works are proof that he had it in him to strike a stout blow in a good cause. The spirit

of Agincourt was not found wanting at Trafalgar, and the same may be said with truth of the Glasgow merchant, Scott. The voice of Britain's greatness itself speaks in his books, and as we read them we seem brought nearer to the spirit of Drake or of Dundonald.

In conclusion, Scott's stories have here been considered together, for though the *Log* is on the whole justly the favourite of the two, in general characteristics they are almost identical. Quite towards the close, both books display some slight tendency to 'drag,' but in this respect the *Cruise* is the worse transgressor. It is also the more loosely put together, and this despite the fact that in the relations subsisting between Lennox and Adderfang, and the mystery which surrounds young De Walden, the author has obviously been at pains to sustain interest by something in the nature of a plot. Again, if he does not repeat himself in the *Cruise*, Scott at least does not steer quite clear of all danger of doing so; for, in addition to the fact that the general pattern of the two tales is the same, several incidents of the latter have counterparts in the former. And yet, on the whole, such fine books are they both that to criticise either is deservedly to incur the imputation of being spoiled with good things.

THOMAS HAMILTON

The statement—somewhat disquieting to the professed littérateur—that almost any man may if he choose write one good book in a life-time, finds something like confirmation in the case of Thomas Hamilton. Not primarily a writer, and not gifted by nature with any very remarkable talent or grace of the pen, he yet contrived to produce a book for which a few transcripts of military life in peace and war, a few pictures of travel, perhaps a portrait or two drawn from the life, have sufficed to preserve, after seventy years, a portion of the favour with which it was greeted on its first appearance. The materials for a sketch of his career are scanty, but blanks in the narrative may to some extent be filled in from a perusal of *Cyril Thornton.*

Born in the year 1789, he was the younger son of William Hamilton, Professor of Anatomy and Botany in the University of Glasgow, his elder brother becoming in time Sir William Hamilton, the celebrated metaphysician and intellectual luminary of Edinburgh. He was put to school in the south of England, and about the year 1803 entered the Glasgow University, where he studied for three winters, giving evidence, as his brother has borne witness, of ability rather than of application. His taste for a military life was at first opposed, but having satisfied his friends by experiment that he was unsuited for a

commercial career, in 1810 he obtained by purchase a commission in the 29th Regiment. He had hardly joined, when the corps was ordered out to active service in the Peninsula, where it bore the brunt of the hardly-won battle of Albuera, in which Hamilton himself was wounded by a musket bullet in the thigh. During his short military career, he was once more on active service in the Peninsula, and also served in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick during the American War, subsequent to which he returned to Europe, his regiment being sent as part of the army of occupation to France. Retiring on half-pay about the year 1818, he came to reside in Edinburgh, and began to turn his attention to literature. He had received a good classical education, and being well introduced, he was hailed as a congenial spirit by the Blackwood circle, and becoming associated with the magazine, threw himself into the spirit of the enterprise, to which he furnished contributions both in verse and prose. In the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* he occasionally figures as 'O'Doherty,' a name, however, which was also applied to Dr Maginn. He is described in *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk* as possessing a 'noble grand Spaniard-looking head,' with a very sombre expression of countenance, and a tall graceful person. The natural freedom of his movements seems, however, to have been to some extent impeded by his wound. Carlyle, who knew him later, describes him as a 'pleasant, very courteous, and intelligently talking man, enduring, in a cheery military humour, his old Peninsular hurts,' and altogether it is easy to see that he must have formed an interesting and popular figure in the Edinburgh society of his day.

Having married in 1820, he resided for several summers at the picturesque little dwelling of Chiefswood, near Melrose, where he had an appreciative neighbour in the person of Sir Walter Scott, and where the greater part of the *Youth and Manhood of Cyril Thornton* was written. This book appeared in 1827, and at once attracted attention. In 1829, the author followed it up with *Annals of the Peninsular Campaigns, from* 1808 *to* 1814, and in 1833, after a visit to the New World, by *Men and Manners in America*. In later life, having lost his first wife and married again, he settled at Elleray, in the Lake District, where he saw a good deal of Wordsworth, of whom he had long been an admirer, frequently, as we are told, accompanying the poet upon long mountain walks. His death, occasioned by a shock of paralysis, took place at Pisa, whilst he was travelling with Mrs Hamilton, on the 7th December 1842. He was buried at Florence.

No doubt the novel of *Cyril Thornton* has in time past owed much of its popularity to its varied action and frequently shifting scene, and if we are to judge it now on literary grounds we have no choice but to acknowledge that great portion of its interest has perished. Still, there remain a few admirable passages, and in this particular instance the lines of cleavage between true and false are marked with peculiar distinctness. For the book may be described as fragments of autobiography embedded in a paste of romance. Now imagination was by no means Hamilton's strong point; his fancy was neither very happy nor very abundant, and when he essays character-painting on an important scale—as in the case of old David Spreull, the conventional eccentric

but beneficent uncle of the story, and his faithful servant Girzy, he is as deficient in anything like true insight as he is in lightness of touch. But though his fiction is of this heavy quality, he could present to admiration what he himself had seen and taken part in, and from time to time he has thought fit to do so, with excellent effect.

Cyril Thornton is the scion of an old county family, who, at a very early age, has the misfortune accidentally to kill his elder brother. His father's affection is in consequence alienated from him, and he grows up under a cloud. In time he is sent to the University, and the scene of the story shifts to Glasgow, thus affording opportunity for some scathing portraiture of the merchant life of that city. At Glasgow Cyril makes the acquaintance of his uncle, and by the amiability and independence of his character conquers the affection of the rich old childless man. He has now arrived at man's estate, and whilst visiting his aristocratic connection, the Earl of Amersham, at Staunton Court, he sees, loves, and is beloved by, the beautiful and fascinating Lady Melicent, the daughter of the house. Their scarcely-avowed attachment is interrupted by the fatal illness of Cyril's mother, and being summoned to return home with all speed, Cyril is there informed that, in a spirit of cruel vindictiveness, his father has disinherited him. His gloom deepens, and after some further romantic and amatory experience, at length—alas! it is, indeed, at length—he joins the army. This is what we have been waiting for, and our patience is now rewarded. At first he is quartered at Halifax, where, at that time, the Duke of Kent was Commander-in-Chief, and we are treated to a satirical portrait of His Royal Highness, followed by a good deal of interesting

description of the military life of those days, interspersed with characteristic anecdote, and varied by love-intrigue and a duel. Then follow travel and sea-faring, with eloquent picture of an ascent of the Peak of Teneriffe, of the Bermuda islands, and Gibraltar. Whilst Cyril is at the last-named station, the vicissitudes of military life are illustrated by an outbreak of yellow-fever, and when he is on his way back to England the transport ship which bears him becomes engaged with a French privateer. From all this it will be seen that of incident and movement there is no lack, yet it is not until after the outbreak of the Spanish War of Independence, when the hero is ordered with his regiment to the Peninsula, that our expectations are fully satisfied. In such passages as, for instance, those which describe the storming of the heights of Roleia, the night spent by Cyril on out-piquet duty, or the capture of the fort witnessed by the light of fire-balls, we have, not only the scenes of war, but the poetry of the soldier's life set before us to admiration. Scarcely less excellent is the account of Cyril's further service under Wellington, Sir Rowland Hill, and Marshal Beresford, at the lines of Torres Vedras, the siege of Badajos, and the battle of Albuera, our interest in which is greatly strengthened by knowledge that the writer was himself a part of what he describes. Our only regret is that he has devoted so comparatively little of his book to what he does so well. For all too soon we have the hero back in London once more, frightfully disfigured by a wound received in action, and as a consequence slighted by the dazzling but shallow Lady Melicent, who before had looked so graciously upon the handsome soldier. And now the novel begins to drag lamentably. The hero's

domestic misfortunes strike us as superfluous, whilst the madhouse scenes, where the characters discourse in 'poetic prose,' are in the basest style of melodrama. Nor do we care enough for Mr Spreull and his Girzy to have much patience with the languid and long-drawn concluding scenes in which they take part. Suffice it then to say that, ere we bid adieu to Cyril, he is restored to his family estate, enriched by the inheritance of his uncle's fortune, and consoled for the loss of the fickle Melicent by worth and affection in the person of Laura Willoughby, the friend of his youth.

The writer of the obituary of Hamilton in *Blackwood* is eloquent in praise of the literary style of the book. But when we find the novelist, who writes in the first person, declaring that 'the elements of thought and feeling within him were conglomerated into confused and inextricable masses,' or describing a housemaid as being 'busied in her matutinal vocation,' or alluding to the 'supererogatory decoration of shaving,' or, when he wishes to inform us that there was a doctor in a certain village, employing the locution that the village 'had the advantage of including in its population a professor of the healing art,'—then we dispute the competency of his critic. This inflation of style is the more curious in that, fortified by his English education, Hamilton, like Miss Ferrier, is by no means inclined to deal mercifully with the foibles of his countrymen, as is amply shown by his portrait of Mr Archibald Shortridge, or his account of the visit of the five Miss Spreulls, of Balmalloch, and their mother to Bath. But for this we should naturally have passed over any slips in his own style, preferring to regard them as the not unamiable lapses of a hand more skilled to wield the sword

than drive the pen. His book on the Peninsular Campaigns is written in good straightforward English, but in *Men and Manners in America* he again falls victim to the temptation never to use one word where two will do nearly as well. When the characters in *Cyril Thornton* converse—be they officers in the army, charming young ladies, peers of the realm, or (like Miss Mansfield) daughters of respectable tradesmen—they uniformly make use of finely rounded and elaborately constructed periods, preferring as a rule the third person as a form of address—as, for instance, when a lady, addressing the hero, observes, 'I should be surprised to hear that Captain Thornton was of those,' and so on. This, however, is, of course, no fault of the author's, but simply a not ungraceful literary convention of the age in which he wrote.

Though he professed Whig politics, Hamilton's pose throughout his writings is one of aristocratic hauteur, and we are consequently the less surprised to learn that the book in which he embodied his observations on America gave dire offence in that country, provoking angry reprisals. It may be that the comments of the gallant captain are made occasionally in a spirit neither wholly free from insular prejudice, nor from that particular pedantry which is sometimes generated by a military training. But it is also manifest that the existence which he surveyed—in a world, as must be remembered, at that time really new—was in many respects a sufficiently bare, comfortless, inelegant, and unrefined one, strangely lacking in the elements of elevation in public or private life. Hamilton strove to judge it fairly, and his observations are those of an intelligent and honest critic. Passing easily, as they do, from grave to gay—now commenting

on the tendencies of democratic government or of the tariff, now comparing the constitutions of the different States, now describing the prison or scholastic systems of the country, and now touching upon the beauty and the dress of the ladies, upon dinner parties, modes of eating, barbarisms of language, and the like—they may be read with interest and historically not without profit to this day.

Of his *Annals of the Peninsular Campaigns*, the author tells us that it was intended to appeal to a wider public than was likely to be available for the lengthy histories of Napier and Southey, its object being to extend a knowledge of the great achievements of the British arms and an appropriate pride in them. Hamilton had special qualifications for the task, and he supplied an admirably terse and lucid narrative, but this was not accomplished without a sacrifice of much of that picturesque and personal detail which does so much to save history from dryness, and to make it attractive and memorable to the general reader. So that his end was but half attained.

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